

# LIFE AND LETTERS

EDITED BY DESMOND MACCARTHY

VOL X No. 32. JANUARY 1931

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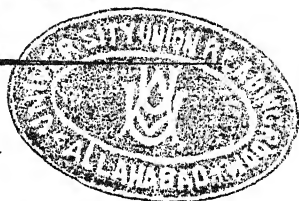
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# LIFE AND LETTERS

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NUGENT BARKER



## THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF MONSIEUR CHARBO

In that tiny place, we could have heard the gentlest of voices. And the stranger's voice was not gentle. It boomed. It boomed with the note of big dinner-gongs.

Imagine it! At Bourdaloue's, in the rue Balbec—that wonderful voice! I turned round sharply in my chair, and looked at him. I said to myself: '*Mon Dieu*, what will become of us all?' He was big, he was fat, he was like a Périgord pig, he was like a shipped goose; his great beard was as black as a fried mushroom; and his lips were as thick and as pink as a couple of Alsace sausages.

At Bourdaloue's, in the rue Balbec! It was enough to make an angel weep; and I am not an angel. But I assure you that this small establishment was never very far from Paradise. Let me tell you the dishes that they served there. The *sole Bourdaloue*, the *entrecôte Bercy*, the *poularde Wladimir*, the *bécasse à la fine champagne*, the *crêpes Suzette*. For the spring, perhaps, a *gratin de crevettes roses et de morilles*. It would be a sacrilege not to mention the delectable wines: the Vouvray, the Château Yquem, the Château-Haut-Peyraguey, the Musigny '*des Amoureux*'—above all, the Chambertin, with the sunset in its heart.

Look at those red clouds, over the river. It is marvellously silent here, in your river-tavern; before the coming of the bearded man, it used to be the echo of silence in the rue Balbec!

Yet he has had his uses, yes? For the story that I am about to tell you is of this man. I have spoken of his appearance. Now I shall speak of his disappearance.

His disappearance——

*Aïe, aïe!* what are you laughing at? One moment. You yourself have put an idea into my head. Whenever I look at a man, I know very well that some years earlier he was quite another person. Is it not a fact, that every five, or ten, or twenty years—myself, I do not know the time, to be sure—each man has a new length of hair on his head, and a whole new surface of skin on his body? We have only to look at our hands—at our faces in a looking-glass—then at some old, faded photograph taken in babyhood, to know that this is true. *Pouf*—we are gone! We have disappeared! We are quite another person!

Listen. For many months I saw Monsieur; for many months I heard his voice. Every day, at the same hour: Monsieur Charbo, bellowing like a bull, with a serviette under his chin. Sometimes he would come alone; at other times—emphatically he would not. On those occasions he would be accompanied by a little friend, a ‘pretty girl’, with a great mop of curly hair the colour of Calvados brandy, a very wide, red mouth, and eyes—*ma foi*, they must have been two inches long. One could see that she was rather timidly fond. He called her Sylvette, in a voice that he would try to soften occasionally, Sylvette, Sylvette, Sylvette. . . .

I suppose I saw her half a dozen times, no more. He was happier when he came alone, I think; though it

seemed to me that he was always very happy and selfish. Here, now, is the manner of his daily arrival. For just one moment the open door would be darkened: and there was Monsieur Charbo, look! see! immense, black-bearded, fat as flesh, striding to his table, booming out to Grégoire: 'Bonjour, Grégoire! Ma sole Bourdaloue!'

A little man, that Grégoire. A little, meek man, with wrinkles in his voice; whenever Sylvette was away, Monsieur Charbo would be commanding him, or teasing him, or cracking a joke with him, at short intervals, throughout lunch-time. And at first we were shocked, immensely shocked. Never before had we known such a great calamity in that tiny temple of the rue Balbec, where food and silence used to be the only gods. Bourdaloue himself, the good Bourdaloue, with his white jacket, and fat, round chin on which you saw a little beard that shone like an oasis in the desert—Monsieur Bourdaloue was very angry with the new customer, and requested Grégoire not to answer 'that man' when he called so loudly; but the stranger had an appetite, and was a gourmet into the bargain: so, therefore, Monsieur Bourdaloue thought the better of it, and on many occasions afterwards I saw him serve the client with his own hands. 'Bien perdu, bien connu,' I whispered, and lifted my glass in honour of the silence of past years.

Yet I did not show my resentment. I was calm. I listened and watched. There was a little table in the window, and from here I had been in the habit of peering into the street whenever the exigences of the meal permitted me; but at last I changed my chair, and looked only at *him*. I was very sly. I said to myself: 'Be careful, Jules Levasseur; take care that he does not see.'

Yet in spite of my terrible slyness, he did see. Yes? For

one day, on his way out, he stopped at my table, and handed me a pencil-note: 'Les félicitations de Sosthène Charbo.' It was the first time that I had heard his name, and there was something in it that made me feel afraid. For a moment I could not collect my thoughts. Next moment I felt ashamed; and because of my agitation, I tore up the note. The room was very tiny. I did not know what to say. When I had thought out my fine speech, it was too late. Grégoire stood at my elbow, offering Cognac. It was very awkward. And Monsieur Charbo was bowing and smiling. Then he put on his hat, and strode away into the rue Balbac.

What a predicament! It was not a pretty smile. All the blood in my body was frozen, my teeth chattered, and for days afterwards I was unable to fix my mind upon the incomparable *caneton à la presse*. For this reason, and because also I wished to make amends for my impoliteness, I decided to watch no longer the immense Charbo. He took no further notice of me: very good, I would take no further notice of him. I saw him come; I saw him go; I heard his voice behind me; sst!—in a few days I was back again at my old tricks, I was watching every movement of his fat body! But discreetly, now. Whenever he looked up from his plate—and I had learnt to time his actions to a nicety—I looked down at mine. There was a mirror in a gilded frame, and here I could watch my enemy without being seen by him; and it is possible that I was soothed by the mirrored Charbo, for after a while his actual presence ceased to trouble me. I grew accustomed. As time passed, we took him for granted, all of us. He became an institution in that place. So it continued. The weeks flew, the months also; a whole year came to an end: and always there was Monsieur Charbo, booming



like a bull, with his great beard, black as a mushroom, nearly hiding the napkin under his chin. Then one day we had that famous murder in the rue Darn. You have heard of it, yes?

The murder in the rue Darn? Rue Darn. . . . Ah, yes, now you remember. It had come at a time when your own murders were rather 'few and far between'. A horrible affair. 'Some girl or other'—is that what you said?

'Some girl or other'! Why do you put it so coldly as that? The poor little one! How she would have been delighted to sit by our sides at this window, looking across the river! Here comes a small cloud, drifting this way, like a feather; it reminds me of her. Alas, alas! To you it was but a tale; to us, who at any moment might take it into our heads to stroll up the rue Darn—what a tragedy! You have an English word, Monsieur. Her end was shocking. I implore you never to ask me things that I cannot tell. C'était un carnage inexprimable, l'œuvre d'un chien d'enfer!

Poor little thing. Dead without a name. No trinket in her dress. No finger-marks on the white paint, on the articles of toilet, on the white china door-handle. No weapon thrown away. Nothing but footprints, footprints, in the thick dust of the faded carpet.

Everywhere one would hear talk of 'The Murder in the rue Darn'. It penetrated even the secluded atmosphere of Bourdaloue's, in the rue Balbec; it whispered and boomed in the daily conversations between the little Grégoire and the fat Charbo. The talks they had! We others, we have listened by the hour to their two voices, the big voice and the little voice, that were thick and thin, like soup. Grégoire said that, and Charbo said that. But never did they come to any conclusion. How could they?

It was interminable! In those days I used to sit with my chin on my propped hands, looking out of the window, or I would lean back in my chair, sipping my miraculous Louis Philippe brandy, and the still more astonishing coffee: thinking of past years. Years that used to kneel in silence at the ghostly, kingly feet of Brillat-Savarin. All gone! All gone! . . .

How little you use your English rivers. In half an hour I have seen but two tugs, and two barges, turning the river-bend. And it makes the year go very slowly, very deliberately, here at the tavern: well, that is what I like: I like to go very slowly, very deliberately. We were terribly slow in the rue Balbec! Just our few selves, a few tugs, pulling our lives along. And as time passed, I began to realize that I was listening to his voice long after it had ceased to talk of the almost forgotten murder in the rue Darn. But my ears were inattentive; I was full of thoughts; gazing downwards, into the depths of my Calvados brandy, I could see the bright colour of her hair—and her big eyes looking up at mine—and could hear—at last—like a tiny dirge—the tinkle of the dead girl's name—Sylvette—Sylvette—Sylvette—Sylvette, until it drowned all other sound at Bourdaloue's.

You will find these Larranagas in splendid condition. I brought them over with me from France, from Paris—it is now many years ago. A thousand devils! Why did I not jump up in my seat, and denounce him there—before them all—before the whole room!—before—before—he disappeared? Listen! It was so clearly the fault of my friend Maillabauau of the Paris police.

Maillabauau. No, you would not have heard his name, he did not come into the Paris journals, he had retired,



and did not come into them at all. Yet he might have done so much while there was still time! He permitted my Charbo to slip through his fingers. That I can swear! Oh, the imbecile! Like a fat olive! Sosthène Charbo, murderer of Sylvette—there was nothing more clear to me than that. . . .

He should have been more sympathetic, my poor Maillabauau, yes? Why are you smiling, *hein?* Ah, zut! it is because you are like him, you also are imbecile, you laugh at my instincts, you turn into ridicule all my impetuous ways!

So! I have offended you. Permit me: another beer? Please, yes! Another mug of this good beer. *Merci*, Monsieur! There is an enormous restaurant, a great, gaudy place, in the rue des Petits-Champs; all day it is full of a vast assembly of people, and it was here that I had my first consultation with Maillabauau, in a big room that was very private because it was very noisy. I remember the inferior kidneys *cocotte*, the clatter of the service, the sharp, English voice of a woman who called for her bill; then suddenly Maillabauau, wagging his long head over the Touraine:

‘Zut! Sylvette and Charbo!’

‘But you should see Sosthène Charbo!’ I shouted, ‘you should see Charbo! You should see his face!’

‘So, therefore,’ says Monsieur Maillabauau, greatly diverted, ‘you wish me to suspect this murderous-looking villain. And why, my little Jules? Because they have found some poor girl who cannot be recognized!’

‘What!’ I cried, astounded; ‘you do not assist me?’

‘There are other people in the world, Monsieur, besides Sylvette and Charbo!’ answered my poor friend.

‘Sylvette is no longer in the world, Monsieur,’ said I.

And again I told him that I had not seen her since the murder in the rue Darn.

Bah! What are instincts to a man like Maillabauau? Delicate flavourings are beyond his palate! Yet I said to myself: 'By and by you will be able to convince him, Jules Levasseur'; and during the following weeks I did not lose my appetite for the superb Bourdaloue dishes, but ate, on the contrary, with an extra eagerness. In that tiny room where the buff walls were gently lighted by a single long, low window, Grégoire's passage amongst us was attended only by the discreet clinking of plates, and Charbo's beard hung like a black curtain over his black heart. What a terrible picture the big man made! Had it not been for his magnificent taste in food and wines, I should have judged him the greatest devil in all Paris. As it was, I vowed that I would prove him devil enough in the eyes of my friend Maillabauau. 'Just you wait, friend Maillabauau.' Yes? Just you wait! That is what I said continually; and often, during my thinking and planning, I would forget to order a bottle of my favourite Chambertin with the larded guinea-fowl, or a Pouilly with the *moules marinières*.

Sometimes I saw Maillabauau, and he would call out: 'Well, my little Jules! How goes it?'

'Magnificently,' I would reply.

Again, because Monsieur Maillabauau was a retired detective of police, and possessed, therefore, many important friends in high places, I used to call on him, in the evenings, at his rooms in the boulevard Beaumarchais; and in spite of the amusement with which he regarded the whole affair, I would pretend that I was making great progress, that things were coming to my ears, et cetera, *hein?*

In addition, I must tell you that I went many times to the neighbourhood of the rue Darn, and there made friendship with the widow Paetsch, whose German husband had left her a grocery in the rue des Trois Fontaines. While purchasing cheap, unwanted things over the counter, I lifted up my hands in horror of that cowardly assassin who had brought so evil a reputation to the rue Darn.

'La pauvre petite,' said she, shutting her eyes; 'ah-h-h, la pauvre petite!'

'You knew her, Madame?' I continued.

'Perhaps—perhaps—but I have so many young customers—they come—and they go,' sighed Marie Paetsch remorsefully, slipping my money into the till; and often I was able to call on my friend Maillabau with little bits of gossip, little bits of advice.

As, for instance:

'What is it, Jules?'

'It is about our friend Charbo.'

'Sans doute!'

Then I would tell him some information that I had received.

'Zut! We must have more than that, Monsieur!' Maillabau would exclaim; so, therefore, on the next evening:

'What is it this time, Monsieur Levasseur?'

This time it was something vastly more important, something that would make his eyes open, 'a choice morsel'. Madame Paetsch, casting her mind back, had remembered very distinctly that on one occasion, shortly before the murder, she had sold a pound of *pralines* to a pretty girl whose hair was the colour of Calvados brandy.

'Good: proceed.'

'And that Madame had not seen her since,' I added.

'Good: proceed.'

'Bagatelle!' I cried angrily. And away I went, for the circumspection of that man was beyond measure.

*Alors*, one day Monsieur Maillabauau, catching me by the arm, conducted me into the restaurant in the rue des Petits-Champs.

'It is about Charbo,' he whispered, over the *sole maison*.

'But this is good!' I cried, 'this is magnificent! This is the very thing!'

'No it is not!' snapped Monsieur Maillabauau.

'Proceed,' said I.

'Charbo used to live in the rue Caulaincourt. He was a musician, a composer, and played on the flute——'

'He played on the flute!'

'*Voilà!*'

'It is beyond conception!'

'They have told me that he used to play in the orchestra. "What orchestra?" I demanded; well, but they did not know. His friends were poets and painters and journalists; he was very reserved, and did not make himself at all popular with the members of his own profession. Sst! Do not interrupt me. I hunted about, and discovered more than one of the theatres where they had known him. His name, they said, was always Sosthène Charbo; a big-bearded man. Then one day he disappeared from Montmartre. On making further inquiries,' ended Maillabauau, in his dry, professional voice, 'I learnt that Sylvette Loury was a friend of his.'

'Well, you have done magnificently!' I exclaimed. 'Loury—Loury.'

'*But we all know that!*' cried Maillabauau, in a kind of

despair, throwing up his hands. 'We know that Charbo is Charbo! We know that Sylvette is Sylvette! We know that they knew one another! What, then, do we not know? Everything! We do not know that the murdered girl was Sylvette Loury—and Sylvette Loury was nothing more than a name and a pretty face in Montmartre, my little Jules!'

'Ah-h-h, truly, it is very difficult!' said I; but I went to bed happy that night, knowing that the great Maillabau had come to his senses.

*Alors*, one morning I called out to him: 'What a pity it is that I tore up his note!'

And all this while you must figure to yourself the fat Charbo, sitting at his table, day after day. . . .

Here comes another tug; here come two barges. With what a persistence they plunge through the waters!

There used to be many peaceful pictures before he came, in the room, and through the window: the passing of a pretty face in the street; my coat and hat on a chair beside me; a small clock ticking; the mirror that I have already mentioned; six Forains, in black frames, on one of the buff walls; the door through which Grégoire entered from the kitchens; Monsieur Duval sitting at his table, Monsieur Bellechasse sitting at his, Monsieur Barféty, Monsieur Prouteau, Monsieur Pihan, Monsieur Roux; but Monsieur Charbo, I felt, was a Fuji-Yama that we were unable to omit from these fleeting pictures that passed through our minds. You know how it is with the Japanese, and their pictures, and their great mountain? Well, he had become a necessary ingredient of the luncheon hour; and suppose, for example, that one day he had failed to put in his appearance at Bourdaloue's, *mon Dieu!* it would have been as though the cook had forgotten

some important flavouring or garnishment of the cuisine!

In fine, he had a universal presence. Therefore I was urged no longer by the thought that I must watch him out of the corner of my eye. Always I felt him, sitting near me, or saw him in far places wherever I turned my head. Sometimes I would hear his loud voice—but it was such a familiar sound that for days on end I would not hear it at all. Time was passing now very smoothly and swiftly. Monsieur Prouteau was away once, for three weeks, with a hæmorrhage in the nose. When he returned he was quite pale; but Bourdaloue soon brought back the blood into his face. We were all business men there: not one of us would be absent for more than a six days' holiday in the whole year; and as for myself in particular, excepting for the two occasions when I lunched with Maillabau in the rue des Petits-Champs, I was not absent at all. Another year passed, and only Bourdaloue's bill of fare reminded me of the changing seasons. That is because I was no longer consumed by impatience; because, also, I was filled with a great confidence for the future; because, also, I was remembering always new things against Charbo—old things—things that he had said, perhaps, to Sylvette, across the table, in the old days. Therefore I do not know when it was that I decided to follow him home. . . .

Yes, you are smiling, you! But consider: in my thoughts I had never separated him from Bourdaloue's. Mountain that he was, interloper, always it had been to Bourdaloue's that I must go, at the lunch hour, in order to see him, to watch him, and to lay my plans. We are a conservative people, and therefore very sentimental; like you.

So, Monsieur, I chose a day when the *suprême de soles* was not so ravishingly cooked as usual, when the guinea-



fowl was not as fat as she might have been, and a *je ne sais quoi* hovered over the *flan aux quetsches*. What had happened? There were whispers of domestic trouble in the home of Monsieur the Cook: his son had arrived from the French Congo; his wife was ailing; *voilà!* we knew well enough what it was—it had happened before—Madame was going to have a baby. So, therefore, we had to make shift with the poor cooking, *hein?* I peeped at Monsieur Bellechasse. Already he was reaching out for his coat, his hat, his gloves. I peeped at Monsieur Duval, at Monsieur Barféty, at Monsieur Prouteau, at Monsieur Pihan, at Monsieur Roux. All, save Monsieur Prouteau, were gathering up their things, and rolling their cigars in their mouths. ‘Bonjour, Monsieur.’ ‘Bonjour, Monsieur.’ ‘Bonjour, Monsieur.’ ‘Bonjour, Monsieur.’ Even at that time, I felt that things had come to an end; that I, at any rate, would not be lunching at Bourdaloue’s any more. ‘Bonjour, Grégoire.’ ‘Bonjour, Grégoire.’ ‘Bonjour, Grégoire.’ ‘Bonjour, Grégoire.’ ‘A la bonne heure!’ I thought to myself; and peeped at the bearded man over my coffee cup. He, too, showed signs of the general dissolution. Presently he whipped the napkin from beneath his chin—Grégoire came running up—the bill was settled—and there was Monsieur Charbo, setting forth into the lovely April air.

I followed. On the pavement a crowd of people wandered to and fro, up and down, here and there—they jostled me—it had been raining, but now the sun was glistening on the wet street, and somewhere or other I could hear a caged bird singing; there were two working men carrying a great box between them, and all the while calling out: ‘Mesdames, Messieurs! Mesdames, Messieurs!’—but I kept my eyes on the back of Monsieur

Charbo the whole time. There he went, straight ahead, never looking back, trying every moment, as I could see, to get into his stilty stride. But the children and the pretty women had been drawn by the sunshine to disport themselves in the shadows and sunny spots beneath the Ailanto trees: and often I was greatly troubled concerning the back of Monsieur Charbo amongst this pleasant company—would I mistake it for that one, or that one?—and this will appear to you droll, without doubt—because, as you know, always I had been enchanted by his enormous raven beard (which I tried now, in vain, to see floating a little on either side of his bull-neck) and by his colossal size. Where *had* it got to, my Charbo's beard? and where were the glances of admiration or inexplicable fear—the hurried walk—or the averted eye—that I had expected to see exhibited towards my old Charbo? He turned a corner, and I said to myself: 'Aha! Aha! I shall have a better chance to follow him there!' But when, at last, I entered the spacious avenue Mathilde, and was staring along its perspective of blank walls, skinny trees, and sagging pavements that ran down into the roadway with all the mournfulness of sands running into the sea, Monsieur Charbo had disappeared.

Very strange, yes? Very strange and memorable. *Very curious.*

It is possible that you are anxious to learn the precise locality of this Monsieur Charbo. But upon my word, it comes to me that I have never told you the precise locality of Bourdaloue's, that is to say, of the rue Balbec! Well, the rue Balbec is situated, without doubt, in the Ternes-Pereire district, or still farther north; it is, perhaps, a street off the boulevard Pineau, or perhaps, after all, it is in the Levallois Perret district, a street off the rue Cave,



which is near Clichy, where the oil and starch factories are; and, at any rate, the spacious avenue Mathilde is one of those unfrequented avenues a long way north of the Bois, an avenue *manquée*, full of a mournful charm when you have walked along it for a great distance, and have left far behind you the bustle of a little street like the rue Balbec. And always that is the sort of answer that you will receive from the epicures, whenever you have demanded of them the precise locality of their Bourdaloues. Listen! Myself, I did not go a very great distance up the avenue Mathilde, but stood gazing at a figure which began to emerge out of the mists of my perplexity, and which, to be sure, I had been aware of all the while without being *quite* certain whether it really existed—the figure of a shabby man, who walked some little way in front of me, at a brisk step, with his eyes glued to the ground. Thinking that he might be able to assist me, I ran after him, and implored him to tell me quickly, quickly—had he seen a big man, with a black beard, passing that way?

‘No, no, Monsieur,’ said he hurriedly, after a little hesitation, ‘I have not seen such a man as you describe’; and his thin cheeks, weak chin, jutting nose, and shifty, hungry eyes, seemed all to be twitching slightly in the fresh wind.

Very strange and memorable. *Very curious.*

His scraggy neck, rising from his low and not *particularly* white collar, appeared to me the spirit of the Avenue, a channel *manqué*, a thing forlorn. But, while I was scanning his features in my strained and irresolute manner, there came upon me one of these *coups de pied*, *coups de poing*, *coups de bâton*, *coups de sifflet*, *coups de tonnerre*, *coups de vent*, and *coups de dent*: that is to say, I was kicked, and

fisted, and cudgelled, and whistled at, and thunder-clapped, and winded, and bitten, all at the one moment, by the Imp of Knowledge; moreover, to my very great annoyance, I discovered that I was asking the stranger's name.

'Pardon, Monsieur—It was a question—which I had no right to ask. A very impertinent question, that! A matter for my deepest apologies!' He accepted them silently, bowing low, and holding his hat in his hand; then, in his scanty voice, that trembled, I thought, with a note of defiance, he informed me that his name was Adrien Tanrade.

'Adrien Tanrade,' I murmured, thinking all the while of my great discovery; 'but yes, of course, it is Adrien Tanrade!' The wind blew dismally down the back of my neck as I gazed at his fine, prominent nose. 'Why, it is *that* which has given the game away,' I nodded, 'for is it not true, what I have heard said, that the nose is the only feature of the face that rarely changes with the passing of time, or on a restricted diet?' But even while I was so speaking, he had continued upon his journey, dwindling in my sight under the still, wintry trees, to that unknown haven of his, where, without doubt, in the evenings, he took out his music-stand, and piped on the shepherd's flute pastoral songs.

Ah, gentle Monsieur Tanrade! Yes, gifted Charbo! Sad musician! Slayer of Sylvette! Only one thing is there to be said of these two persons: *What an Artist!*

A little bit daily off the beard, just a skimming of the black surface: in effect, no more than a faint sprinkle of the best Arabian *moka* on the white face-towel that he flings every morning over his shoulders and over his chest; and a little bit off the voice, just one vibration: in

effect, no more than would fill the throat of a cheese-mite (living in one of our delicious Port-Saluts of Normandy, for example)—one vibration in the whole day, Monsieur—oh, what an artist, the miracle of that one vibration!—and a little bit off the weight: that is to say, a little bit off the appetite: in short, a little bit off the meal: and such a very little more, at each sitting, that weeks go by before Monsieur Grégoire is tempted to put these abandoned portions on one side for his own eating. Not by a snap of the scissors, nor by the smallest tremor of the vocal cords, nor by the slightest tip of the scales, did Monsieur Charbo exceed his daily reduction of beard, and voice, and grandeur. Cannot you admire the supreme *delicateness* of this wicked man? Just so much a day—Just so much a day—So much? No, no, Monsieur—so little!

And we who saw him, lunch after lunch, at Bourdaloue's, in the rue Balbec, how would we have noticed the slow change in him, eh? Is it not the same with all of us, in our own homes: that is to say, with those of us whose whole lives are spent in one tiny, monotonous place? Every day we look in the same glass, and every day we see exactly the same person. We live, perhaps, with our father, our mother, or with our wife, our child, or with our brother, our sister, and always it is the same person that enters the room.

On the following day I went again to the rue Balbec.

The sun was bursting bright; little trees in tubs twinkled with new shoots on both sides of Bourdaloue's open doorway; somewhere or other the canary bird was singing in its cage, and the April air was of that quickening kind that made me wish for a *gratin de crevettes roses et de morilles*.

But I did not enter, nor did I sit at my delightful window-table ever again. What would you have? It is hurtful

to my dignity, thought I, to be sitting in the neighbourhood of *that monster*. I had arrived late, so that the commonplace, sordid, vulgar, daily rite was in full swing under my very nose. I judged that Monsieur Prouteau was enjoying his larded guinea-fowl. Preposterous person! Ridiculous people! Oh, you ridiculous people! Pigs! Sots! Guzzlers! Fools! Blind fools! Idiots. Stay-at-homes! 'You should follow him into the open,' I shouted (but I shouted it to myself, in the depth of my heart I shouted it), 'into the wild places, into the avenue Mathilde; you should open your eyes, instead of only your mouths, you fat, guzzling lunatics, you—poor—fish!' Then, with the canary bird trilling its song of remarkable freedom somewhere above my head, my eyes, running hither and thither, saw Monsieur Duval sitting at his table, Monsieur Bellechasse sitting at his, Monsieur Barféty, Monsieur Prouteau, Monsieur Pihan, Monsieur Roux—and Monsieur Adrien Tanrade . . .

It is getting late. The room is no longer red. We must go. Shall we go, yes? Waiter! Waiter! Where is he? Sst! Grégoire! Gré—goire!

\* \* \* \*

How peaceful it is by this river bank. Let us walk as far as the bend. And how leafy, too. Yes, how leafy! Look at all these green leaves! It is a real Paradise. *Tiens!* Little did I know that Spring was upon us. I had an idea that everything was still black trunks, and bare boughs.

JANKO LAVRIN

## THE RETURN OF PAN

(ON KNUT HAMSDUN)

## I

An attentive reader of Knut Hamsun's works is bound to be struck by his ever-recurring mixture of two incongruous and, at the first glance, even incompatible elements. One of them is the spontaneous freshness of a man of the soil; and the other, the introspective brooding of a 'decadent' who is familiar with some of the most complicated nuances and contradictions of the modern soul. As an offspring of an old peasant stock, Hamsun has managed to preserve—through all his restless adventures in Scandinavia and America—that innate bond with the soil which is so typical of true peasantry. Hence his intimacy with nature, as well as his instinctive mistrust of town and town culture. Yet the very character of his work was largely determined by his close contact with modern culture and the modern town. Or, rather, by his virulent reaction against them. For, after having passed through all the emotional and mental experiences which they could offer him, he turned his back on them—in the name of the soil, of 'Nature'. The old and hackneyed antithesis, Nature *versus* Civilization, thus became one of his favourite themes. He showed it, however, in certain new aspects, and at times also from an original angle, not to mention his original style and manner. For what makes much of his writing so unique is precisely his quaint blending of a fresh and simple 'racial' flavour with an

elusively sophisticated personal touch—a blending which seems to be one of the main charms of Grieg's music, too. It is not seldom that Hamsun's passages vibrate with something pristine and primeval, as though saturated with the voice of the great Pan himself. And together with this, he can indulge in morbid psychological dissections, as well as in a studied impressionism the very cadences of which suggest the hectic and self-lacerated *fin de siècle*.

Hamsun's very first novel, *Hunger* (*Sult*, 1890), brought a powerful new note into Scandinavian literature; new and powerful not only by its style, but also by its subject-matter. How could one possibly forget that gruesome self-analysis of a talented youth, drifting towards madness and death from starvation in the middle of a busy modern capital? The whole book reads like a delirium of hunger and prostration, or like a nightmare turned into music. And in this nightmare the dividing line between normal and abnormal is ignored, or even obliterated. The author moves in that irrational region where our 'normal' self is disturbed by continuous irruptions of pathologic elements. And he moves in it with an almost clairvoyant insight which he suggests to the reader through an abrupt and fascinatingly nervous style. Together with this, the book shows an inner rebellion which verges on the Satanic. In the depth of humiliation, the downtrodden hero still asserts himself against fate, against his tormentors, as well as against those conditions in which he feels so helpless, uprooted, and so irrevocably doomed.

From now on, this unadapted and unadaptable individual became, for a long time, Hamsun's favourite hero. He had to pass through Nagel (*Mysteries*), Höibro (*Editor Lyng*), and Glahn (*Pan*), before he was portrayed in



*Dreamers* (*Svaermere*) in Hamsun's gayest vein—with a picture of country manners in the background. In the two later volumes, *Under the Autumn Stars* (1906) and *With Muted Strings* (1909), we meet him as an elderly tramp saddened by the passing of life, while in *Children of the Age* (1913) and *Segelfoss* he emerges in the sinister and tragic *déraciné*, Baardsen. Lost, as it were, in the surrounding world, this type asserts himself through a complete lack of conventions. Moody and 'cranky', sometimes bitterly morbid, he is fond of indulging in extravagances, escapades, and caprices. Yet, when trying to get hold of his kernel, we often seize not so much a palpable character as a bundle of 'nerves', of psychological fragments and contradictions.

A typical instance is Hamsun's second book, *Mysterier*. It is a jerky, loose, and ingenuously stammering novel, pieced together with casual impressions, bits of atmosphere, monologues, and conversations, with Johannes Nagel and his sudden love for Dagny in the centre. Once more, Hamsun treads—although less convincingly than in *Hunger*—in that 'Dostoevskian' borderland where man is at the mercy of the mysterious forces hidden in his own subconscious. But whereas Dostoevsky's pathology is primarily concerned with new spiritual continents, as it were, that of Hamsun is centred upon the elusive shades and filaments of the 'nerves', on sudden irrational whims, and particularly upon the confusion of an undermined will. Nagel himself is a self-centred modern individual without a centre. Tossed between all sorts of contradictions, he can strike one as a genius *manqué*, a monomaniac, a romantic misanthrope, a posing charlatan, a lunatic—until the reader seems to lose all reliable clue to him, and ceases to distinguish, like the hero himself, between his

sincerity and his pose. There is practically no action in the book, but only a static collection of moments and 'slices of life'—on the background of a small coast town with its busybodies, its gossip and conventions.

In his subsequent two Christiania novels, *Editor Lynge* and *Shallow Soil* (*Ny Jord*), Hamsun adopted a less subjective method. Yet it was here that his 'rural' bias asserted itself, for the first time, in an attack upon the corrupt and artificial city life. He also became openly didactic through his two mouthpieces: Høibro in the first and Coldevin in the second novel. A much more artistic and deeper expression he gave it, however, in his next book, *Pan*—perhaps the best known of all his works.

The hero of this novel, Lieutenant Glahn, is again as puzzling and restless as the one of *Hunger*, or of *Mysteries*. Yet this time the unadaptable individual tries to come to terms with life through a return to 'nature', to the pantheistic oneness with all creation. Hamsun's book, while intensely introspective and self-centred on the one hand, is full of dithyrambs in praise of such oneness on the other. Many of its pages are permeated with 'the blood of all Nature seething'; with the breath of the great Pan. And at their best they are fragrant as wild flowers, and as intoxicating as old wine. This work is a worthy predecessor of Hamsun's later tribute to Pan—*Growth of the Soil*. It is also a good introduction to another powerful element of Hamsun's creations: to his peculiar erotics. For while the Pan-element entices the brooding hermit, through his very exaltations, into a vegetative *pre-individual* harmony, the capricious and complicated modern Eros suddenly destroys all that harmony—destroys it in a way which is quite typical of Hamsun's own conception of love and sex.



## II

In this respect, too, Hamsun shows a curious mixture of the depersonalizing primary 'libido' with a most individualized romantic passion. The first makes many of his characters rather Pan-like, that is, impulsive and wildly sensuous; while the second develops their introspection, their shyness and fastidiousness. Intertwined in one and the same person, they lead to a number of contradictions, dissimulations, and various surprises in which Hamsun the psychologist takes a peculiar interest. And he delights most of all in the masks of Eros, as well as in that hidden or open antagonism which is so frequent an undercurrent of love.

Already Nagel (in *Mysteries*) was making a fool of himself: not in order to reveal, but in order to conceal his feelings for Dagny. So did the hero of *Hunger*, when in love with 'Ilayali'. And this reserve we find in Hamsun's subsequent lovers with an almost monotonous repetition. They pretend to be indifferent when they most attract each other: a hide-and-seek which enables the author to display all kinds of psychological halftones, of twinkling 'between the lines', and even of subtly cruel pranks on the part of Eros. For Hamsun's Eros is cruel. He simply revels in love that wounds, and even more in love wounding itself through an excess of pride and shyness. (This motive finds its expression also in Hamsun's most ambitious dramatic attempt, *Munken Vendt* (1902)—a work reminiscent of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, but inferior to it in both conception and execution.) Yet the reticence of his lovers often comes also from an impulse to lacerate their own passion in order to enjoy it through its negative intensity: through pain and suffering which verge, now and

then, on psychological masochism. 'One can be dragged by the hair over hill and dale, and if any asks what is happening one can answer in ecstasy: "I am dragged by the hair". And if any asks, "But shall I not help you, release you?" one answers "No". And if they ask, "But how can you endure it?" one answers, "I can endure it, for I love the hand that drags me".' (*Pan*.)

It is through aspects such as these that Hamsun burrows in the secrets of erotics. Yet, however much he may exalt the romantic side of love (particularly in *Victoria*), he still prefers to deal with it on the plane of elementary 'libido'. Love as an overwhelming sexual obsession is crudely expressed in his story, *The Voice of Life*, for example, where a young woman spends a passionate love night with a complete stranger—beside the room in which the corpse of her deceased old husband is lying on the bier. On the whole, as soon as Hamsun abandons his romantic conception of love, he is in danger of falling into the other extreme: into love as sheer 'unsublimated' sensuality. The number of Hamsun's sensualists—such as Mack in *Pan*, *Benoni*, and *Rosa*—is considerable, not only among his men, but also among his women. Together with the fastidious Charlotta (in *Editor Lynge*), *Victoria*, or *Rosa*, he deals even more convincingly with such irresponsibly 'carnal' types as Fru Kareno (in the play, *Before the Gate of the Kingdom*), Teresita (in its continuation, *The Game of Life*), the ageing Edwarda (in *Rosa*), Barbro, and partly Inger (in *Growth of the Soil*), Oliver's wife (in *The Women at the Pump*), and many others.

The intensity of life means to Hamsun's sensualists simply the intensity and the continuous gratification of that sexual vitality which simmers in their blood. Once this is gone, life itself begins to fade away in their eyes.

Their only prospect is old age with no compensation whatever, since 'age brings nothing but age'. Or, as he puts it in his *Last Joy*: 'One says that with old age there come other joys which one had not before—deeper, truer joys. That's a sheer lie'. Is it possible to imagine a more cruel tragi-comedy of old age than Hamsun's *Sunset* (*Aftenrøde*)<sup>1</sup>—the concluding piece of his dramatic trilogy? Like a true peasant, Hamsun, too, seems to think that a man has lost all once he has lost the strength of youth and manhood. And under strength he usually understands the vitality of sex and passion. As long as this is alive, man is alive, too. Even a distorted and chaotic vitality is preferable in this respect to no vitality at all. That is why his sensualists cling to it as long as they can. The transition to old age is a tragedy for them—like a compulsory passing into a stale and gloomy limbo-world. The sad helplessness of such a transition breathes from the pages of *Under the Autumn Stars*, *With Muted Strings* (*En Vandrer spiler med Sordin*) and of *The Last Joy* (*Den siste Glaede*); while the final struggle with it is brutally rendered in the play, *In the Grip of Life* (*Livet ivolt*).

Such a conception of erotics is in itself reminiscent of the 'natural man'. Yet Hamsun clearly implies that the latter becomes erotically depraved only through his contact with town and culture. Isak and Inger (in *Growth of the Soil*) live in the early years of their marriage 'like birds or beasts'. But their love is innocent because it is a healthy spontaneous impulse. It is the voice of Nature, unadulterated by civilization. Inger becomes depraved only later, during her stay in the town. An even more warning example of the 'civilizing' influences is the servant girl

<sup>1</sup> There is also an equally satirical poem under the same title in his collection of poems, *Wild Chorus*. (*Wildt Kor*, 1904 and 1921.)

Barbro—the murderess of her two illegitimate children. Town and civilization are thus invariably interpreted by Hamsun as agents of corruption. And, in his opinion, woman is even more easily tainted by it than man, since she is ‘poor in mind, but rich in irresponsibility; like a child in many ways, but with nothing of its innocence’. The light-headed Inger regains her stability only long after her return to the wilds: when she has become rooted, once more, in the soil, and has forgotten all about the ways of the town. So the fundamental bias of Knut Hamsun comes out even in his attitude towards erotics.

### III

The erotic ‘libido’ as the vital sap and fountain head of life, on the one hand; and the open or tacit rejection of all those factors which tear one away from the soil, from the ‘great Pan’, on the other—such are the two basic and at the same time converging motives of Hamsun’s creations. We find them not only in his early books, but also in his later, more ‘objective’ novels of manners, which begin—roughly—with *Benoni* and *Rosa* (1908), and are followed by *Children of the Age*, *Segelfoss*, *Growth of the Soil*, by the voluminous *Women at the Pump*, *The Last Chapter* (*Siste Kapitel*), and also by his latest novel, *The Vagabonds* (*Landstrykere*, 1927).

An apparent detachment and a kind of epic quiet are typical of these works. Having abandoned his frequent jerkiness, Hamsun preserves, or even increases, all his suggestive power, as well as his peculiar tone and twinkle behind which he can conceal an incredible amount of irony. (Think only of his description of Barbro’s trial in *Growth of the Soil*.) Instead of concentrating mainly upon

a single hero as before, he now prefers to depict and to interpret the entire panorama of life as he sees it. Yet the angle from which he observes it is still prompted by his former dilemma of Soil *versus* Civilization. In fact, this dilemma becomes now even more straightforward than in any of his previous works, as we notice already in his *Children of the Age* and *Segelfoss* (in the original, *Segelfoss By*, i.e. *The Town Segelfoss*).

In these two novels we follow the gradual transformation of a primitive rural community into an industrial town—with all the economic, moral and social consequences such a change involves. The semi-feudal aristocrat, Willatz-Holmsen, is gradually supplanted by the enriched upstart, Holmengraa. The result is a bustling centre of local industry with its shopkeepers, officials, clerks, its labour, even with its 'press'. And Hamsun is only too willing to point out all the negative aspects of such a metamorphosis. The irony with which he describes the 'educated' village lad and the subsequent pastor ('with the makings of a bishop'), Lassen, is unforgettable. The erotic element, with the usual Hamsunesque hide-and-seek, though salient in both books, yields this time to their social side, or even social 'message'. The sudden bankruptcy of the industrial enterprise, as well as the plight of the increased community, which has to face a future without work and food, reads almost like a symbolic warning.

In these, and also in most of his later works, there are pages of discussions about land, industry, culture—discussions which are often too deliberate, almost interpolated, and in which one can easily recognize the voice of Hamsun himself. All that fosters the town civilization, with its industrialism, its dryly intellectual type of man, is

hateful to him. He sees the only salvation in clinging to the soil, in deep and simple rootedness. Was not already Rosa's first husband, Arentsen (in *Benoni, Rosa*), who had passed through a University education, the very acme of shallowness and cynicism, in comparison with the solidly rooted yokel type, Benoni? Hamsun distrusts the entire modern education in so far as the latter severs people from the soil. He distrusts even more that semi-education which tries to raise the level of the masses on to that of the towns. And as to those 'educated' workers who have been already infected by the industrial town mentality, he speaks of them with disapproval, if not with scorn. According to him, they 'do nothing for the inward welfare of others, they have not been able to cultivate any ethical sympathy. They make a pretence of social instinct and do not possess even that. They want to roar and turn things upside down, and when it comes to a pinch even their own leaders cannot hold them in. And then we see what a human travesty such an industrial worker becomes when he has learnt the tricks of the class above him: he leaves his boat, leaves his land, leaves his home, parents, brothers and sisters, leaves the beasts, the trees, the flowers, the sea, God's high heaven—and gets in exchange the Tivoli, the club-house, the tavern, bread and circuses. For these benefits he chooses the proletarian life. And then he roars, "We working men".'

Such and similar outbursts we find in his *Women at the Pump*—a novel in which Hamsun lavishes all his artistic skill on the petty 'crawling existence' of an industrial coast town—with the crippled eunuch, Oliver, as its symbol. Its atmosphere of stifling vulgarity, of senselessness, void and boredom is at times past endurance. The entire novel reads almost like a deliberate antithesis of



Hamsun's previous book, *Growth of the Soil* (*Markens Grøde*, 1917).

## IV

This work can be considered the focus, and also the highest achievement of Hamsun's creative efforts. It is as typical of the later Hamsun as *Pan* is of his earlier period. But while showing us Hamsun's art at its best, it points out, both directly and indirectly, also his 'message' more fully than any other novel of his. Its theme is, Man and the Soil. And the book itself is a great epic of this relationship.

Isak, the lonely settler of the wild forest land of Sellanraa, is a simple patriarchal figure. Far away from civilization, he is one with the mother Earth, who rewards his labours a thousandfold. It is not the 'acquisitive' instinct that makes him grow rich and rooted, but his love of the soil, and the pride he takes in recovering it from the wilds. The only troubles he knows are those which come from town and civilization. It took years before Inger, his wife, got over the bad effects of the town. In contrast to his elder son, Sivers, the younger, Eliseus, had spent his boyhood amidst the 'civilized' conditions of a town, in consequence of which he became sapped for the rest of his days. There was 'something unfortunate, ill-fated about this young man, as if something were rotting him from within; the child had lost his roothold, and suffered thereby. All that he turns to now leads back to something wanting in him, something dark against the light'. Finally he goes to America and disappears like a withered leaf carried off by the wind.

Amidst all the adversities and trials, amidst the encroaching industrialism which claims a larger and larger

area of the countryside, Isak stands firm as a rock. And it is in him and his like that Hamsun finds at last fullness, grandeur, and a sense of life. His mouthpiece, Geissler, is clear about that when sermonizing to Sivers: 'Look at you folk at Sellanraa, now; looking up at blue peaks every day of your lives; no new-fangled inventions about that, but field and rocky peaks, rooted deep in the past—but you've them for companionship. There you are, living in touch with heaven and earth, one with them, one with all these wide, deeprooted things. No need for a sword in your hands, you go through life bareheaded, barehanded, in the midst of great kindness. Look, Nature's there, for you and yours to have and enjoy. Man and Nature don't bombard each other, but agree; they don't compete, race one against the other, but go together. There's you, Sellanraa folk, in all this, living there. Fjeld and forest, moors and meadows, and sky and stars—oh, 'tis not poor and sparingly counted out, but without measure. You've everything to live on, everything to live for, everything to believe in; being born and bringing forth, you are the needful on earth. 'Tis you that maintain life. Generation to generation, breeding ever; and when you die, the new stock goes on. That's the meaning of eternal life.'

This is how Hamsun's Pan comes back again—in order to turn into a god of vegetative patriarchal group-life, barricaded against all civilization. He becomes domesticated, tame and toiling, occasionally even pious. He still preserves his goat-legs, of course; but they are hidden beneath homespun cloth and home-made boots. Rousseau's idealized savage has thus been simply replaced by the idealized yokel—in the name of priority of Nature over Civilization. This priority Hamsun reiterates, with

due emphasis, also in his more recent novel, *The Last Chapter*, through the contrast of Daniel and Fleming.

Illustrations such as these are a sufficient proof that Hamsun is, perhaps, the greatest representative of what might be called the 'back to nature' trend in modern letters. Devoid of the moralizing tendency (in a Christian sense) of Tolstoy and Rousseau, he is almost as vehement as they in his hatred of town and culture. And he makes the same mistake, too, in identifying culture with pseudo-culture. He ignores the fact that town, as a civilizing agent, disrupts the vegetative patriarchal life 'rooted deep in the past', not only for the sake of a general disintegration, but also in order to make man conquer, eventually, a new and broader rootedness. Hamsun looks backwards and not forwards. Like the old romantics he, too, projects his will and longings into a state of consciousness that belongs to the primitive past. Pan, as he conceives him, is an outlived romantic idol in a modern garb. For we can no longer go *back* to nature, but only *forward* to it—a thing which is essentially different from Hamsun's own impulse. What we need is that simplicity which has transcended civilization, and not the one which is vainly trying to eliminate it. Yet while rejecting Hamsun's trend, we cannot help being grateful for that art which has grown out of it. A vital bias is, after all, often more stimulating and more inspiring than the absence of bias. Great art can thus thrive even on great errors.



MICHAEL DILKE

## AN ISLAND

I write of a certain island now, because I have wanted to for some time, and this is so good a reason that before doing so I shall indulge myself by mentioning a few others which I have seen, or read of, or imagined and which have attracted me.

There is, then, St. Kilda—a blue cone above the skyline forty miles away; Fair Isle from a porthole at seven in the morning; Foula with a line of cloud always along its tall peak. There is Aru, where, I have read, you may row up the rivers and out again to the sea beyond, hearing as you go the Great Bird of Paradise flap and squawk in the forest. Besides these, Baltic islands attract me—quite flat and bright green, though not large enough to support a herd of pied Friesian cows, and these have amber on their beaches. Also an island of mud and filth level with the flood-waters of the Guadalquivir, double-decked with flamingos; those above standing, those below sitting on their flat nests; both reflected, so that four rose-coloured tiers lie like a bar along the horizon. And now I will write of my island.

I have been there only once, in June a few years ago, during an expedition among the more obscure British Isles. It is high and precipitous, and lies off a larger and less interesting island, which in its turn lies off the rocky mainland shore. I will call it the Skerry of Skerryness, because that is so obviously not its name that no one will waste time looking for it on the map; the larger island I will call Isleness Island for a similar reason. In the lee of

Isleness Island is a sandy inlet which would be a cove but for the Cornish associations, and which is called locally a wick. We came down the road over the hills to this wick, and found a long boat with turned-up bow and stern lying ready to be hauled down to the sea on the worn ribs of whales. With two men we hauled it down and were rowed out past Isleness Island, where seals raised their wet shiny heads and gulls screamed protests against us. The strait between the two islands is narrow with steep sides, and this steep side of the Skerry is the only place where it can be scaled at all. We climbed up by small ledges to the sloping roof of the island.

The roof of my island is its first perfection. Very little peat lies on the rock, just enough for the flat plants of thrift to cover it almost all over with a fine, windswept carpet of leaves. From these the flowers spring up so close that their pink heads touch on the stalks, and the island would be pink-roofed but for one reason. This is that wild blue scillas, squills I believe they are called, grow thick among them, their bulbs buried in the matted roots. These, being as plentiful as the thrift, would, if allowed, roof the island with blue. The two colours together have a curious, inconclusive effect—now pink, now blue, according to the light, not mingling into purple. When we lay down and looked closely at this singular turf, the reason for the dispute was plain. The flowers of thrift have a dry, light texture like needlework, and their leaves are as shiny and complicated as Indian brass. The plant has a homely appearance. Scillas, on the other hand, have the consciously classic grace of bay and ilex, daffodil and snow-drop. Pink is the dominant colour; the scillas, one remembers, are rare. The two do not mix.

We rose and walked up the slope towards the seaward

cliff. As we went we came to cracks in the ground, such as one sees in photographs of streets in China at earthquake time. Some of these were quite wide, just wide enough to drop through on a dark night; they had sharp edges and were quite black. We picked up flakes of rock and dropped them down. We listened, but heard nothing.

Over the cracks and rocks a rock-pipit called and flew about us. It called a penetrating note and danced, skipping and flirting among the flowers, as if trying delightedly to attract our attention to itself, the only modern, highly-developed bird on the island. Compared with auks and fulmars it was indeed a fairy among mooncalves, and might have been saying, as it peeped and fluttered round us: 'They're here, they're here! Real, new people to see and speak to after æons among these simpletons and survivals, these loons and prehistoric guys.' But we ignored the rock-pipit, being offended by the noise it made.

We walked on up the slope till we came suddenly on the fine natural feature (as it will be called, no doubt, by some estate agent as yet, I hope, unborn) which is the greatest perfection of the island. It has come about, I think, in the following way. When land is being destroyed by the sea, some parts of it may be stronger than the rest and remain as headlands, till they are cut off, encircled, and made islands. Often they are eaten away all round till they stand up sheer like columns, entirely surrounded by cliffs still holding on their tops the slope of a vanished hillside. Such an island is my island, but it is a peculiar one. Its cliffs are iron-hard and could stand in any shapes—leaning in or out; yet they are so vertically erect that when a guillemot, flying in alarm from its crevice two hundred feet up the cliff-face, kicks its big green egg so that it rolls to the edge and falls, it falls within an inch of the rock the



whole way down, dropping unbroken into the sea. We saw this happen. From a boat these cliffs look higher than their two or three hundred feet. They have the same straight precision and complex ornament as the face of a Gothic cathedral; and, indeed, looking up at the diminishing lines of in-cut ledges with their swarming inhabitants, it is impossible to avoid comparing them to carvings with innumerable little saints, upright and solemn in their niches.

To return to the fine natural feature. In the passing of time the sea has gnawed its way into the foot of these cliffs, and has hollowed out caves from the very heart of the island. I do not know how far it is undermined, but the roof of one great cave has given way and washed out through the arch. It is as if a shaft had been driven down from the roof of the island to sea-level, with a passage to allow the sea to flow into it. The whole of the roof has fallen, so that the shaft has straight sides, and it is quite large, about eighty or one hundred yards long, as I remember it, and forty or fifty wide. The floor is the sea with the waves echoing in through the arch and resounding inside, unable to get out. On ledges and in cracks round the sides of the shaft, sea-birds—guillemots and kittiwake gulls—breed in hundreds. They never fly up over the island, but pass out in a constant traffic through the cave-entrance. This shaft is wonderful to look at, and when I think of my island I like to imagine it hollow, like a great hive, on whose painted roof I can lie for ever, watching and considering its elusive and incomprehensible inhabitants. We lay a long time at the edge of the shaft, looking down at the twice-lit water and sun and shade varying on the bird-haunted walls.

In the darker places, where the walls of the shaft over-



hung, the kittiwakes were startlingly white, with the whiteness of oceanic spray and sun, the clean, bleached colourlessness of unimpeded, unreflected light. Yet because they were white and in a cave they seemed pale with the pallor of a cavernous darkness, like white blind newts and crabs from caves in Mexico. They sat, still and attentive, or fluttering suddenly their pale curved wings like torn paper or the shivering white petals of Christmas roses. When a little storm of wing-flapping had subsided they would glance about as if deprecating such behaviour, and gaze up at us again like small grey-and-white nuns putting aside their private affairs to pay particular attention to visitors to their huge stone convent. Very pigeon-like they were, white sea-doves in a gigantic dovecot, but when they dropped from the ledges they flew with the strange impersonal flight of gulls—white heads, white tails, and grey, bent wings.

In the cave they were almost silent, and outside there was a confusion of sound over the cliffs, all birds crying together; so that only when they passed in companies between the Skerry of Skerryness and Isleness Island, or between Isleness Island and the main shore, could their voices be heard alone. There they passed all day in small trailing flocks with a nucleus of leading birds, and as they went they would seem to roll over forwards with a diving, dancing motion very pretty in the sunshine—the white bodies and the flashing wings. As they did this one of them would call its name in a queer, harsh voice, with a stutter on the last syllable, on the 'a' in 'wake'. Sometimes this was all, sometimes others would call out as soon as they could after the first, so that the voices ran together in an outburst of discordant syllables. This cry was harmonious and yet very strange, seeming the proper voice

of the big sunny waves and populous cliffs, but with no connection the most ingenious mind could find. Compared with this, it is easy to understand where the night-ingale derives his chuckling, sensuous appreciation of a June night; or the yellow-hammer his drowsy song of grasshoppers, first learnt from the noise of the growing grass and corn. The sea has only deep sad sounds, which the ordinary gulls repeat in their mewing, wailing calls. And it may be that the sound of the ocean is so uniform and so enormous that it is silent to the kittiwakes, and all the year they fly silently alone over a world where they alone exist. When they return in spring to shore and sound and the company of their kind they are like men who have died and come back mad into the living world, repeating idiot phrases from the place where all is known. They can only dance maniacally in the sun and call their meaningless name in their broken, ghostly voices.

There were other birds in the cave. Under the arch of the entrance, above the sunlight shining yellow from outside on the green-and-white water in the shaft, were two shags on a dark, inaccessible ledge. The female was squatting on her nest at the back, almost hidden behind the upright figure of the male. He looked nearly black in the shadow, with just a hint of glossy green showing as he moved himself about in his anxiety. He was very thin and amazingly sinuous, his body writhing like the body of a snake under the influence of his emotions. As we approached along the edge of the shaft, near enough to see his pale green eyes, his alarm became extreme, and he turned his head incessantly from side to side, quite unable to decide which was his best eye, and whether a coiled or upright position of the neck was an advantage. Also he kept looking down at the arch and back at his mate and

nest, torn between two opposing stimuli, one urging flight, the other defence of his home. His agitation was distressing to watch, for he was a creature of a less exciting age, when such decisions were not necessary, and evolution was imperceptibly slow. His worried, primitive eyes expressed the strain of surviving the appearance of man, first with boats and nets, then with guns, and now at last with poisonous oil on the sea; all these without any change in himself, and in a mere day in the life of his species. Chance and circumstances decided for the shag under the arch. Accidentally he trod over the edge and fell off into the empty air. He unfolded as he fell, just like an umbrella, with his sticklike neck hooked by the head and beak, his short, straight tail and shaking, fluttering wings. There had been something umbrella-like, too, in his standing position—a new beautifully rolled umbrella with carved, emerald-eyed handle and fabric deliberately dyed a novel shade of green. On his way through the arch, flapping, energetic and untidy, he was like this umbrella opened suddenly in a strong gust. Outside, where we could no longer see him, we could imagine him fully spread, speeding away handle first, refusing bravely to turn inside out in the wind.

Though ridiculous on first taking flight, shags have a fine appearance when travelling together over the sea: four or five or a dozen, strung out like carved black beads on a string, heads up and tails down, heading for their roosting place with a quick steady flight just clear of the waves. It is curious to conjecture whether flying tires or bores them, or gives them pleasure; whether they consider how far they have to go, or whether, as is most likely, they are hypnotized by the physical action and just fly on,

heads up and tails down, till they arrive with a loud smack or thump, as they do, at their roosting places.

At these times, and especially on this evening journey, their ancient appearance is very marked. So, from new sharp cliffs higher than our worn hills, pterodactyls slanted once to snatch forgotten fish from deep new seas. At evening they would return, following, perhaps, one behind another, not flapping like the shag, but gliding in on set wings to settle with a rustle of leathery draperies at their colonies. And the smell of those colonies; what an edifice of smells was there! From the bat-like wings may have come something of the immense mustiness of those Peruvian caves whose roofs shuffle with vampires. Yet the creature was a reptile, and breathed of the dens where crocodiles allow drowned bodies to putrefy to the proper state of edibility. It was of the sea, but whether it had that flavour of the last good catch of mackerel, vomited by gannets into the crevices of their rocks, or the far superior emanation that lifts to Heaven from the black grease on the slip of a whaling station, that, alas! we cannot tell. I would not wish this smell to be still common upon earth, but we can surely regret that no man has ever sampled and described it, nor ever can.

When the male shag was gone the female became anxious, but did not stir her prone body from the nest. Only her head and neck jerked about, examining us from every possible angle and position, first with one eye, then the other. Soon the motion seemed to intoxicate her, and she went on and on with a flicking, automatic gesture, a nervous, dangerous movement, like a snake in a hole, all the time we were there.

There were guillemots in the cave, hundreds and hundreds of them, all up the sides of the shaft where there

were not kittiwakes. They were all along the ledges in rows, either standing facing inwards, or, where there was not head room, squatting flat. They were still and plump and shapeless, like lice in a fold of the skin of some vast grey animal. On the wider ledges they stood in dense masses like antarctic penguins, so like them, in fact, as to seem merely small relations, blest by an ability to fly. When they left the cave, as they did in groups as gusts of emotion swept them, they dived down and out—whirring, aerial torpedoes, not passing near us. On the outer, seaward cliff they were more approachable, and were in such thousands that when those on the ledges were alarmed and looked out over their shoulders to get a glimpse of us peering down from above, their beaks stood out as a fringe of spears, a seething, bristling armament threatening from their tiers of battlements. Those flying, coming up from the sea and passing slowly to look at us, came very close, grunting and growling in disapprobation. These northern guillemots were very sleek in their sooty and white plumage—quite different from the brown suède of the southern form; and the passing crowds were varied by the smarter and more curious razorbills, and by puffins, their anxiety pathetic beneath their farcical exteriors. There were also many of the variety, race or freak, called the Ringed or Bridled Guillemot, a decorated sort, living and breeding without prejudice among the others. It seems to have lost itself in the common kind, which might now be called 'Northern and Southern Guillemots Ltd., in which was incorporated the Ringed Guillemot, before the Age of Mammals'. It is difficult to describe the beauty of these birds, for by our normal standards they seem merely quaint. Yet alive and close, sun-warmed and glossy from the sea, they have a

brilliance—a polished exactness of design—which shows that they too are of an ancient race, though not reptilian like the shag. Or if reptilian they are most like tortoises—I remember a picture of a pied, embossed tortoise from Greece—and they have certainly that truculent, curiously sophisticated, and yet diffident air of tortoises.

It was nowhere possible to reach the eggs of the guillemots without going down, leaning on the swaying, stretching rope, over those strangely perpendicular precipices. And it was necessary to reach the eggs, for many hours of youth, scattered over many years, had prepared for this occasion. I could remember wondering, even before going to school, at the difference between black-birds' eggs of a dull spring green and others of a light chalky blue. 'But guillemots' eggs', I used to say, 'are all colours: you never find two the same.' I had never seen a guillemot's egg, nor a guillemot.

There was a row of eggs at eye-level, in a long narrow crack of the cliff-face, lying singly on the fouled rock in dozens and dozens, sometimes two or three deep, or stretching back into crevices where they lay in groups. And what a sight they were! When I was very young I had imagined them in cheap dyed colours; I had never believed them really beautiful at all. There were some of a deep cream with small grey spots and black scrawls. There were others of clear, painty pea-green streaked with chestnut. Others of all sea-blues from deep, dark, Mediterranean colour to sea-green and pale, clear forget-me-not. All these marked with thick oily black or brown. There were some grass-green unmarked; others chalky white; one mauve marbled all over with soot. Many had purple stains beneath the surface, like fired minerals beneath the glaze on Chinese pottery. That is what they



were most like, with the same serene, transparent colours; but many had been painted on the surface, some laboriously scribbled in fine copperplate writing, from end to end of their waisted, tapering, or rotund forms. There was one most beautiful of all. It was faded forget-me-not or almost porcelain white, shading into new forget-me-not or March blue. It had a fine tracery of curling beechbud-coloured lines, and beneath them, in the substance of the shell, were mauve shadows like cloud-shadows on a pale sea. This one I brought away and others also, for I still hoped this kind of beauty could remain. I washed away the dirt, which made the colours glow but left them uncontrasted. Then the colours dried in the shell and faded to the tones of coloured blotting-paper, so that I had only blue, green and white, spotted eggs, dull and useless in a drawer. But I can still take them out and let them lie in water, hoping not to blur the spots and streaks; and then the sea colours come alive again, and on the shaded, pale blue egg the violet shadows seem to move as they did on the Skerry of Skerryness, above the pale blue, shadow-clouded sea.

There was one other kind of bird nesting in the shaft of the cave—a modest and obscure species, the black guillemot. But though modest it has, when properly considered, a smarter colour-scheme than any of its relatives. The puffin is a Tudor clown, the razorbill is Cavalier, or perhaps Regency, the guillemot is clearly Victorian, but the black guillemot is the very last word in super- or ultra-modernity. He is neat and economical in shape, streamlined. He is quite black all over except for a bold oblong of white each side, inconsequently placed upon the wing. His feet are scarlet, and his bill, though black outside, is bright orange, it is said, within. This scheme of decoration



might surely be developed with great effect on a suitably proportioned motor-car.

The beak of the black guillemot has long attracted me. Once, when I should have been watching an inter-house football match, I read how Richard Kearton, on a visit to St. Kilda, sat at the foot of enormous cliffs surrounded by rare and remarkable birds. This, at least, is how I remember the incident. All at once he noticed a small orange spot appearing and disappearing under a rock. Looking closely he saw it was a black guillemot calling at him, opening and shutting its bill. The bird, he found, was rare, and he failed altogether to find its nest. To me, as I ducked my head below the library window to avoid the eyes of the Captain of Football, it had seemed a fabulous bird, and one whose nest I could never hope to find, when Kearton had failed. Yet here at the top of the shaft with its broken water and swarming crowds of birds, six or seven black guillemots sat, each beside the hole where I knew so well its eggs were concealed that I would not take the trouble to go round and look. They sat quite still, to avoid attention, no doubt, to their nesting holes, but with a stillness which no black guillemot can maintain except on these occasions, so that each bird was a pied and pointed indicator to what it hoped to conceal. To have attained to this state of familiarity was presumably a triumph: I no longer cared to look at what so great a man as Kearton had failed to find. And yet—the black guillemots sat silently among the rocks—I have still only other people's word for the orange interior of their beaks.

Because my island is waterless, foodless and shelterless, you must leave it at last and go back round Isleness Island to the main shore. There is little harm in this if you can come again next day, but it seems now a serious

matter to have looked down into the shaft for the last time, and to have left at once for Aberdeen and the South. We did it, of course: we turned away and went back over the thrift and scillas and the black crevasses, but I cannot remember going, nor climbing down to the boat and rowing out of the gully. I remember clouds of kittiwakes at the corner—the great rock prow—of the skerry, and guillemots flying down impetuously into the uprising waves; all rather dim in the light which is almost the same by night and day in the northern summer, when the sun is gone. I remember very clearly passing Isleness Island, over long, cold, afternoon seas. The wind was rising fast and the men glanced over their shoulders as they rowed. We watched the rocks so intently we did not mind the spray or the violence of the waves. When we turned into the wick existence lost a rare intensity.

Looking back from the road over the hills at the islands half obscured by night on the flat, immense sea, we said: 'We shall come back, of course, some time.' The rest of life and the world seemed then only background to those hours and that place. But now—can I pack my bag and buy a ticket at King's Cross to look at an island full of seagulls?

R. McNAIR SCOTT

## A NOTE ON DR. JOHNSON AND DEATH

From his earliest youth Johnson was afflicted with profound melancholia, and 'the great business of his life,' he told Boswell, 'was to escape from himself'. To him solitude was a condition of horror, because it 'delivered him to the tyranny of reflection', and allowed his thoughts to dwell on the terrors of dissolution. He could not believe that any virtuous man desired to be alone, and naively asserted that 'the solitary mortal is certainly luxurious, probably superstitious, and possibly mad', and that 'his mind stagnates for want of employment, grows morbid and is extinguished like a candle in foul air'.

He feared his own company so much that he would employ the most desperate shifts to retain that of others, and provoked Boswell to the sorrowful remark that 'Dr. Johnson was often found with exceedingly mean companions' whom he had persuaded to remain with him through the night hours. For it was at night that loneliness most preyed upon his spirits. 'I lie down,' he said to Mrs. Piozzi, 'to endure oppressive misery, and soon rise again to pass the night in anxiety and pain.' The fear of death took hold of him, and he tortured his mind with doubts of his virtue and of his ultimate salvation. 'Even at the age of ten,' writes Mrs. Piozzi, 'his mind was disturbed by scruples of infidelity, which preyed upon his spirits and made him very uneasy; and to the last, she continues, 'he had a daily terror lest he had not done

enough [good] which originated in piety, but ended in little less than disease.'

This diffidence and fear of death impressed and amazed all whom he met. 'Good and excellent as he is,' writes Fanny Burney, 'how can he so fear death?' 'All his life', said Sir Joshua Reynolds, his dearest friend, 'he was preparing for death'; and Arthur Murphy, the fluent translator of Tacitus, records in his biographical sketch that 'the contemplation of his own approaching end was constantly before his eyes: and the prospect of death he declared was terrible. For many years, when he was not disposed to enter into the conversation going forward, whoever sat near his chair might hear him repeating from Shakespeare:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod;

But it is Boswell who, with a touch of imagination, presents the most vivid picture of Johnson's peculiar obsession. He had questioned Johnson on the subject of death. 'Here I am sensible,' he writes, 'I was wrong to bring before his view what he ever looked upon with horror: for although when in a celestial frame, in his *Vanity of Human Wishes*, he has supposed death to be "Kind Nature's signal for retreat" from this state of being to "a happier seat", his thoughts upon this awful change were in general full of dismal apprehensions. His mind resembled the vast amphitheatre, the Coliseum at Rome. In the centre stood his judgment, which, like a mighty gladiator, combated those apprehensions that, like the wild beasts of the arena, were all around in cells

ready to be let out upon him. After a conflict he drives them back into their dens: but not killing them, they were still assailing him. To my question whether we might not fortify our minds against the approach of death, he answered in a passion, "No, sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies: but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance; it lasts so short a time." He added (with an earnest look), "A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine." In his last illness Death became to him intensely terrible, and his conscience a torment. 'Priez pour moi!', he said to Fanny Burney, 'I need your prayers.' Only at the very end, she writes, the dark horror of death lifted, and he said that he felt 'the irradiation of hope'.

The complement to this dark horror of death was a passionate interest in the activities of life, in the actions and thoughts of his fellow-men. 'He had often in his mouth,' writes Murphy, 'this line of Pope's—"The proper study of mankind is man" '; and he himself rebuked Mr. Thrale for discussing the scenery with the observation, 'Let us, if we do talk, talk of something: men and women are the subjects of my enquiry.' He loved to mingle with the crowds at the hustings, throw his hat in the air and huzza, or join a party at the coffee-house and enter into dispute with its leading wit. He wanted to be where there was movement and life, physical or intellectual. London he loved for the reason that he could never there lack company. The country conjured up to his mind a picture of loneliness and isolation. He craved always to have around him the atmosphere of humanity.

It is this profound interest in his fellow-men which has given his observations so lasting and popular a currency. They were not minted in the library, but refined from the



common experience of the crowd. Sometimes they are cynical, but more often generous: the observations of a man eager to forgive the failings and commend the virtues of a species so necessary to his own happiness that he came to declare that there was 'no real delight (excepting those of sensuality) except the change of ideas in conversation'.

Boswell, in the passage already quoted, touches on the inconsistency apparent in his writings and opinions. The reader of *Rasselas* or the *Vanity of Human Wishes* might well imagine the author to be a disillusioned Diogenes. Yet the writer who declared that 'Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed' remarked that he would willingly sacrifice a limb to remain one year more on earth, and the writer who said, 'That life protracted is protracted woe' declared to Boswell that the world was not half so wicked as it was represented. It would be easy to produce a cento of quotations from his works, in each of which some human foible is exposed, some pretension crushed, some benevolence traced to its source of self-interest: yet his actions witness to his determination to see the best in human nature. He receives a coarse quack doctor into his Fleet Street menagerie of odd characters, and commemorates his death in verse of genuine emotion; and justifies to the startled household of Mr. Thrall his entertainment of Moll Flint and Bet, common thieves and whores, on the grounds of their uncommon personality. It is as though in his writings he is trying to convince himself of the vanity of this life that he may be compelled to rest his hopes of happiness on that to come. Yet a contemplation of a future life is unable to arouse in him a noticeable enthusiasm, and he can find no more glowing words to describe its felicities than these: 'In a state of future perfection

to which we all aspire there will be pleasure without danger, and security without restraint'. So lukewarm a tribute witnesses to the uncertainty of his belief and the perversity of his writings. Doubtful of himself, he never permitted any man to discuss the Christian religion in his presence. 'He considered it,' writes Mrs. Piozzi, 'as a kind of profanation to hold any argument about its truth', and he was even nervous of attending proselytes lest their extravagant praise of religion might awaken his combative instincts and lead him to detect as fallacies those things he held as sacred. 'Be not too hasty,' he wrote, 'to trust or to admire the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men.'

His refusal to allow the subject of religion to be discussed illuminates his whole life. The scruples of infidelity which disturbed him at the age of ten were never satisfactorily disposed of. Within his mind, he knew, lurked active doubts, ready on any encouragement to dispossess him of that belief in the articles of Christian faith which he so earnestly desired and so slenderly preserved. Either careless or convinced of immortality, he would have been at peace with himself; but torn, as he was, between doubt and desire to believe, his period on earth was perpetually perplexed, and it is a proof of the stoic strength of his will that though oppressed by solitude, afflicted with the horror of death, and dubious of salvation and futurity, he refused to alleviate his distress by dissipation or railings at Fate; but lived virtuously and uprightly, upholding truth in great and little matters, practising the generous principles of true religion, and justifying to the end his dictum that 'he who lives well cannot be despised'.





## FLORIDA PIER

## PRAY FOR THE PRINCESS

It was a very small principality in a country where the trees grew so big and the mountains remained so small that in places the mountains seemed to shelter under the trees. One would not have been sure that they were intended to be mountains except that the roads wound round them so elaborately that it was clear someone had felt they might otherwise be impossible to climb; if this was the feeling on the part of the person who owned the mountains, one had to admit that the country did have a mountainous way with it, and that the mistake was a natural one to have made.

Not only had the roads been expertly engineered, but an unusual number of picturesque and ornate bridges had been built over the pretty, tumbling streams. There was no contingency of crossing that had not been allowed for. One might want to saunter over the stream here, or on the other hand one might want to go along another fifty yards and cross there. Full provision had been made either way.

The well-trained forest marched up the hills and marched down again on the other side. Whichever way you turned the trees were in perfect parallel lines, so that you could not be sure they had not wheeled as you turned your head. Anyway, you never caught any of them looking as though they were not standing smartly to attention. If the farmyards were in some places very dirty so that a number were hardly fit for the white roads to pass, there is a limit to the amount of perfection that

can be endured, and the farmers were so portly and their wives so buxom that they probably knew just how much dirt agreed with them.

On the whole the countryside bore a look of being so well organized and signposted, intersected with roads that circled and rose, and bridges that arched and preened, that in summer motorists dashed into the principality, made a round of its ways and out again, exactly as though it had been a switchback and not a principality at all. But now it was too early in the year for tourists, and the roads were deserted except for the slow-moving country carts.

The sharply green fans had opened on some of the beeches and not on the others, with that fluttered uncertainty that beeches have, and the bridges alone seemed busy. The streams were very full and dashed along with a great deal of fuss, giving the bridges every excuse for looking as though they had their hands full; it not being for nothing they stood with their backs arched and their legs so firmly planted.

In the capital of the principality the sun was shining, and the shopkeepers stood in their doorways looking disconsolately out on to the square. Hope and idleness had brought them to their doors, since customers had ceased coming to them in their shops. It had been like this for days now. The great people seemed to think it would be unfeeling if they appeared, and the lesser ones, not knowing what was going to happen, postponed their purchases from day to day. For the princess lay dying.

No one had ever known her very well; though she lived in the big palace on the square with the iron gates and all the many windows. She was not their own princess, but the wife of their prince. Before the war they had had a

very good prince, who used to have a red face, and an imperious way with him. He hunted wild boar in his well-drilled forest, he made his foresters wear green, and he could be seen almost any day coming or going with his men across the square. He kept the country in a most agreeable stir, and everybody liked him. Then their prince had died, and after the war this country did not want his oldest son to rule, and that country did not want his second son to rule, and at last several countries together chose the third son. Then they chose the third son a wife, and it was this little lady who was making the country so sad.

She was only twenty-five and she was, of course, their prince's wife. Everybody felt, without saying it, that two such facts would have been enough to keep anybody alive, and everybody shook their heads and muttered: 'A bad business, a bad business,' as though, besides the pity of it, there was something that seemed a little lame-spirited, and which they hoped they with the same inducements would never have shown. She had been ill for a month, and dying for at least a week, and the country was beginning to feel the strain. Everybody's thoughts were on the princess, but no one had more than the faintest knowledge of her with which to busy themselves.

She had lived in the big palace for half a dozen years now, and when she went out it was almost always in the great palace gardens behind the palace, so that she was better known from the picture postcards that were sold to the tourists than she was from any actual encounters with her that anybody had had. Sometimes the big iron gates opened, and she rode out in a great lumbering carriage with her pale little son, but she was so wan and so timid herself that the townspeople never felt sure they

had really seen her, any more than you feel you have really seen a shadow once it has passed.

Now doctors from foreign countries were in the palace, the prince had not left it for days, and for a week a service had been held in the square every day at noon, so that the prayers of her people might help her not to die. The town hall was just opposite the palace, which made the palace and the town hall look as though they had sat down opposite each other to have a polite discussion, and the houses of the square had gathered about in a discreet group, with no unseemly crowding but just friendly eagerness, to listen to what was being said.

The clock on the town hall told the palace it was now ten to twelve, and the palace seemed to hold its rows of windows open very wide as though to say that it had already taken in the time, and that it was quite ready. About the cross in the centre of the square a few people were standing who, when their priest appeared, would presently kneel. They were just the least busy of the people. Those who had felt astray and wistful that nothing happened in their own lives, had come to share this bigger thing, this death of a princess. They felt if they came some of the importance of the occasion might trickle through to them; others were there because they did not happen to be anywhere else, and a few were waiting because the market was over and they were tired.

The attendance at the service of prayer had been mentioned in the Council. Quite a speech had been made about 'this gathering of all classes, united in their concern and their loyalty to our greatly beloved princess'. So that the haphazard little group of people standing idly in the sunshine were sure to be spoken of in the weekly paper as a 'national demonstration'. The phrase

was already in the mind of the Secretary to the Council, and when phrases had rolled in his mind until they gathered many words to themselves, the whole always came out very solidly on the front page of the paper. Some thirty or forty now stood staring vacantly at each other. They did not seem to themselves a gathering of all classes, they seemed nobody in particular, but they all drifted a little nearer together and waited.

A young girl paused near the others and arrested the march of a deep-breasted woman who accompanied her. They stood, a full basket held between them and looked up at the palace windows. There were yellow carrots in the basket, brown crusty loaves, and a red cabbage. The older of the two heaved the laden basket on to her hip, and her full lips parted and she gave a shake to her head. This set the little coral balls in her pink ears wagging, and they went on wagging cheerily while she whispered: 'It is a business, isn't it?'

'Do you suppose she is in one of those rooms, Berta? Do you suppose she is just behind some of those curtains?' There was a little pulse beating in the young girl's round throat and she edged closer to her friend.

'She must be. She'd never choose a back room, surely, and she with the whole palace to choose from!' They stared at each window in turn, trying to deduce by some superiority of curtain just where the princess must be lying.

'Do you think she knows those people are going to pray for her? Do you think she feels it may help? Do you, Berta?' The young girl caught her companion's arm and pulled her a few steps farther into the square. Berta held back, shaking her head again: 'If it does help it's because others pray better than I do, then. I always say the same



words until I seem to get empty inside, and I never know why something doesn't fill me.'

'Oh, Berta!' and she gazed wide-eyed into the older woman's face. 'Are you like that, too? I thought it was just me. I supposed it was because I was so young and stupid. But surely someone here can pray better than that.' She looked about at the people, and there was nothing in their faces to tell her that they had anything she lacked. They were all looking at nothing and beginning to be a little hypnotized by their own idleness. 'Don't they look ninnies!' Then the girl breathed softly: 'I don't believe any of them can pray at all'.

'Hush,' said Berta, 'the priest is coming; someone must pray.'

He was making his way across the square, his big boots kicking his gown out as he walked. The clock on the town hall began to strike twelve.

'We can't go now, Berta, we'll wish while the others pray, and perhaps that will help.'

Berta spread a cloak on the stones, and as the priest took his place by the cross, and raised his hand, all the people knelt. He told them to pray silently, to intercede with God that the princess might live. All heads were bowed, and the square was silent, save for some starlings who chattered noisily in the carving on the town hall. Every few minutes he would break the silence by intoning a Latin phrase, and then again the silence fell.

The young girl said all the prayers she knew, and when she came to the end of them she hoped the princess might live; she wished hard that she might. She thought of her lying on a very big and beautiful bed. Perhaps she was in pain, perhaps she did not want to live. Unless everybody was feeling more than she was herself, it could



surely not affect the princess at all. It was very difficult to make her thoughts reach the princess, and strain as she might she could not feel that her thoughts were reaching God. It was dreadful for everyone to be kneeling here so blankly, listening to words they could not understand, dreadful if the princess really wanted their aid. Perhaps, of course, they were interfering. Might it not be that God wanted the princess to die? She always looked so frightened and unsure. Perhaps God wanted to get her back and comfort her, and all these people were doing wrong. She felt very uncertain and of no use at all. Her knees were hurting, and she opened her eyes to see how Berta was getting on. Berta's eyes were closed tight and her lips were moving briskly. Berta's cheeks were red and she was so plump that she looked like a solid warm rose.

Just behind Berta a strange young forester was standing. His eyes were half closed and he was smiling, or at least his lips were slightly parted, and his face was most pleasant. He was the only person except the priest who stood, and she thought she had never seen anyone stand better. Once she had seen a tall grass growing in a deep pool that was as straight as he, and that was so still you knew how alive it was. She was glad for the sake of the princess that the forester had come, his prayers were sure to make anyone live.

Perhaps she should not be looking at him, but now that she had seen him she still saw him with her eyes closed. All at once she seemed to become transparent and joy poured through her. She trembled as delight surged in her body. Whatever was this? Perhaps this was praying. She did not know. She could not think. Her flesh seemed to melt, and she felt so light that she was not sure she was not made of light. She felt so much that she no longer

felt the stones on which she knelt. The sun warmed her, or passed through her, or else the forester was the sun and she was the forester. Those around her seemed near and sure and excited. It could not be she who felt all this, it must be all the others.

She looked again at the forester, though she was not sure she had ceased looking at him. He stood as though he buttressed a rainbow, and so alert and lovely he looked that perhaps it passed through him and circled round the world. She loved the earth that curved under her, and the sky that curved over her. She loved her breath that came and went like little seasons. It seemed now as though the priest was almost singing his words. The clock struck the half-hour and he could not stop, so tight was he caught in the praying of his people. She held out her arms to the forester, whose eyes were closed but whose arms were outstretched too. They encompassed so much that surely they had reached the princess long ago; perhaps they had passed God, perhaps there was no end to the life the forester knew his way into.

In the palace, the room of the princess was very still. The curtains of her bed were looped back that she might have more air for her faint breaths. Between the big, curving pillows and the thickly dimpled quilt there was a wan oval with closed eyes that was undoubtedly the princess. Three doctors stood nearby, one looking at his watch. Two nurses hovered by the bed. An old dame sat fingering the edge of her lace handkerchief, and a few pompous, hushed ministers were near, but not too near the prince.

He sat in a great chair by the fireplace, a chair carved and covered with florid velvet so that he did not look any more florid than that in which he sat. He rubbed

the tip of a fat finger round and round a seal ring, that was on another fat finger, and his round blue eyes looked neither at the fire nor at the princess, nor at anything else. The silence in the room was so great that it swelled against everybody, pressing them so they could hardly breathe.

One of the nurses made a quick movement with her hands, and everybody instantly looked at the pale mask on the pillows. Everybody continued to look, and a movement of astonishment ran through them all. The prince rose to his feet. The doctors bent forward incredulously. The old dame dropped her lower jaw as though it was something she had abandoned for ever. The older of the nurses looked shocked. For everybody saw that the prim little face on the pillow was smiling. The lips pouted and a dimple appeared in one cheek. Everybody was taut with attention, and doubted if they could ever breathe again.

The prince could have sworn that dimples had never been there before. He had seen dimples, but never there—his memory began to totter—his sense of meetness swooned—the prince and the man in him held each other in a grip that neither dared loosen.

The eyes of the princess opened wide. They opened as though there was so much to see that it might be some time before she could take in those about her. Slowly she sat up, not as a dutiful princess rising, but as a flower whose stem feels the lusciousness of rising sap. So easily did she rise that she seemed to float on the great billowing pillows, and there she was riding them like a lily.

She held out her arms, and if her gesture did not include the prince it at least included so much that he took a step towards the bed. One of the doctors hurried to him.

'This is the end,' he said, 'I cannot advise your Highness to speak to her'.

'The end?' said the prince and drew himself up as he always did when puzzled.

'Yes, yes,' said the doctor, as though at all costs his prince must not think him lacking in experience. 'One often sees this sort of thing—before death.'

'Death!' repeated the prince after him, and grew pale, not because of what the doctor had said, but because the princess seemed to be drawing his very colour to her. 'Surely—that is life!' stammered the prince, and his hands shook.

'No, no, death, I assure you,' said the doctor, and showed himself a man who would do much rather than be at fault.

'But look at her—look at her!' and the prince grasped the doctor's arm, and they stood, one supporting the other.

The hair of the princess had been neatly braided until it encircled her head, and her nightdress had been buttoned close about her slender throat. With a gesture she sent her braids falling on her shoulders, and her white gown opened. She leant forward as though she would rise to her feet. There was so much life in the girl that the old dame began to weep, frightened by what she remembered. Every one stood with eyes agape, swaying as though winds buffeted them, and as terrified as if harried by the tails of passing comets. In their dismay they averted their eyes, and at last only the prince still looked at her. Finally her name burst from his lips: 'Melomée!' It was impossible to say whether it was longing or disapprobation that so moved him.

The princess laughed softly, and perhaps it was this

unseemly sound or maybe the effect of the prince's cry, but the nurses recovered themselves sufficiently to raise protecting coverlets about the princess. At this the doctors rushed forward and each put an appraising finger on the wrist of their patient. Something seemed to ebb from the room, and everyone stirred as though they had been caught unawares and could not remember yet who they used to be, nor knew how they could most quickly return to their wonted selves.

Majestically the prince walked to the foot of the bed and ejaculated: 'My wife—good-bye—you are dying!' He had dismissed many people in his time and he knew his role.

A double light flickered in the eyes of the princess for a little. It might almost have been said to dance there. 'Dying?' she queried, and the dimple reappeared for a second in her cheek. Her eyes went from one to the other of those who stood about her great bed. Their gaze was fixed upon her, full of reproof, abashed, uncomfortable, shocked. When she had completed the circle her head drooped. She looked like one who, accustomed to being in the wrong, succumbs easily to an added error, and sinking down on her pillows she died.

Out in the square the sunlight still fell on the group of kneeling people. Suddenly the priest who had been standing motionless by the cross, broke out in the chant of the prayers for the dead. A minute or two passed before it penetrated to the ears of his people. Then they opened their eyes and looked up at the palace windows. On the second floor the blinds were being pulled down. They continued to stare, and slowly an invisible someone moved from window to window until all the blinds in the palace

were drawn. The people knelt a little longer, puzzled sighs coming from some, and others cried softly.

The young girl beside Berta rose to her feet and, dragging her cloak behind her, they hurried from the square. When they reached the shelter of a doorway they stopped, and putting her hands on Berta's shoulders she shook her roughly. 'What happened, Berta? What happened? Whatever did we do?'

'I don't know,' sobbed the woman, 'it was never me.'

'But if we didn't help her to live, did we—what killed her, Berta?'

Berta was sobbing like a child. 'It's such a business as never was,' she said, and her distress being so great the young girl threw her arms about her and together they cried out their bewilderment.



ROMILLY JOHN

## SÌ COME RUOTA. . . .

A whispering angel stood without  
My lonely cottage door at night.  
The time was still, the dreaming earth  
Bathed in the moon's unearthly light.

And from the fields of living flowers  
A soft breath stole my window through:  
The posied breath of sleeping fields,  
Cool bouquet of the fallen dew.

'When all the stars are gathered in  
From all the corners of the world;  
When to a sizeless point the space  
Of all the firmament is furled—

'When time stops like an outworn clock,  
It will be seen that ravelled love,  
The essence of each corporate star,  
Caused it through time and space to move.'

Whereat, although I listened hard,  
I could not hear another word.  
A wondrous joy possessed me whole:  
Only my beating heart I heard.

And all that night in dizzy thought  
I lay awake and dreamed of love:  
And through my window small I saw  
So near and kind the stars above.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON

## LIFT UP THINE EYES

It is a big assembling plant in a city of the North-West. They assemble there the Bogel car. To be sure, that isn't its name. It is a car that sells in large numbers and at a low price. The parts are made in one great central plant and shipped to the places where they are to be assembled. A great deal of up-to-date modern manufacturing is now done in this way.

There is little or no manufacturing done in the assembling plant itself. The parts come in. These great companies have learned to use the railroad cars for storage.

At the central plant everything is done on schedule. As soon as the parts are made they go into cars. They are on their way to the assembling plants scattered all over the United States and they arrive on schedule.

The assembling plant assembles cars for a certain territory. A careful survey has been made. This territory can afford to buy so and so many cars per day.

'But suppose the people do not want the cars?'

'What has that to do with it?'

People, American people, no longer buy cars. They do not buy newspapers, books, foods, pictures, clothes. Things are sold to people now.

If a territory can take so and so many Bogel cars, find men who can make them take the cars.

That is the way things are done now.

In the assembling plant everyone works 'on the belt'. This is a big steel conveyor, a kind of moving sidewalk, waist high.

It is a great river running down through the plant. Various tributary streams come into the main stream, the main belt. They bring tyres, they bring headlights, horns, bumpers for cars.

They flow into the main stream. The main stream has its source at the freight cars, where the parts are unloaded, and it flows out to the other end of the factory and into other freight cars.

The finished automobiles go into the freight cars at the delivery end of the belt. The assembly plant is a place of peculiar tension. You feel it when you go in. It never lets up.

Men here work always on tension. There is no let-up to the tension. If you can't stand it, get out.

It is the belt. The belt is boss. It moves always forward.

Now the chassis goes on the belt. A hoist lifts it up and places it just so. There is a man at each corner.

The chassis is deposited on the belt and it begins to move. Not too rapidly. There are things to be done.

How nicely everything is calculated. Scientific men have done this. They have watched men work. They have stood watching, watch in hand.

There is care taken about everything. Look up. Lift up thine eyes. Hoists are bringing engines, bodies, wheels, fenders.

These come out of side streams flowing into the main stream. They move at a pace very nicely calculated. They will arrive at the main stream at just a certain place at just a certain time.

In this shop there is no question of wages to be wrangled about. The men work but eight hours a day and are well paid. They are almost without exception young strong men.

It is, however, possible that eight hours a day in this place may be much longer than twelve or even sixteen hours in the old, carelessly run plants.

They can get better pay here than at any other shop in town. Although I am a man wanting a good many comforts in life, I could live well enough on the wages made by the workers in this place.

Sixty cents an hour to begin and then, after a probation period of sixty days, if I can stand the pace, seventy cents or more.

To stand the pace is the real test. Special skill is not required. It is all perfectly timed, perfectly calculated. If you are a body-upholsterer, so many tacks driven per second. Not too many. If a man hurries too much, too many tacks drop on the floor.

If a man gets too hurried, he is not efficient.

Let an expert take a month, two months, to find out just how many tacks the average good man can drive per second.

There must be a certain standard maintained in the finished product. Remember that. It must pass inspection after inspection.

Do not crowd too hard.

Crowd all you can.

Keep crowding.

There are fifteen, twenty, thirty, perhaps fifty such assembling plants, all over the country, each serving its own section. Wires pass back and forth daily. The central office, from which all the parts come—at Jointville—is the nerve centre. Wires come in and go out of Jointville. In so and so many hours Williamsburg, with so and so many men, produced so and so many cars, in such and such a number of hours.

Now Burkesville is ahead. It stays ahead. What is up at Burkesville?

An expert flies there.

The man at Burkesville was a major in the army. He is the manager there.

He is a cold, rather severe, rather formal man. He has found out something.

He is a real Bogel man, an ideal Bogel man. There is no foolishness about him. He watches the belt. He does not say foolishly to himself, 'I am the boss here'. He knows the belt is boss.

He says there is a lot of foolishness talked about the belt. The experts are too expert he says. He has found out that the belt can be made to move just a little faster than the experts say.

He has tried it. He knows. Go and look for yourself. There are the men out there on the belt, swarming along the belt, each in his place. They are all right, aren't they?

Can you see anything wrong?

Just a trifle more speed in every man. Shove the pace up just a little, not much.

With the same number of men, in the same number of hours, six more cars a day.

That's the way a Major gets to be a Colonel, a Colonel a General. Watch that fellow at Burkesville, the man with the military stride, the cold, steady voice. He'll go far.

Everything is nicely, perfectly calculated in all the Bogel assembling plants. There are white marks on the floor everywhere. Everything is immaculately clean. No one smokes, no one chews tobacco, no one spits.

There are white bands on the cement floor along which

the men walk. As they work, sweepers follow them. Tacks dropped on the floor are at once swept up. You can tell by the sweepings in a plant where there is too much waste, too much carelessness.

Sweep everything carefully and frequently. Weigh the sweepings. Have an expert examine the sweepings. Report to Jointville.

Jointville says: 'Too many upholsterers' tacks wasted in the plant at Port Smith. Belleville produced one hundred and eleven cars a day, with seven hundred and forty-nine men, wasting only nine hundred and six tacks.'

It is a good thing to go through the plant now and then, select one man from all the others, give him a new and bigger job, just like that, offhand. If he doesn't make good, fire him.

It is a good thing to go through the plant occasionally, pick out some man, working apparently just as the others are, fire him.

If he asks why, just say to him: 'You know'.

He'll know why all right. He'll imagine why.

The thing is to build up Jointville. This country needs a religion. You have got to build up the sense of a mysterious central thing, a thing working outside your knowledge.

Let the notion grow and grow that there is something superhuman at the core of all this.

Lift up thine eyes, men, lift up thine eyes.

The central office reached down into your secret thoughts. It knows, it knows.

Jointville knows.

Do not ask questions of Jointville. Keep up the pace. Get the cars out.



Get the cars out.

Get the cars out.

The pace can be accelerated a little this year. The men have all got tuned into the old pace now.

Step it up a little, just a little.

They have got a special policeman in all the Bogel assembling plants. They have got a special doctor there.

A man hurts his finger a little. It bleeds a little, a mere scratch.

The doctor reaches down for him. The finger is fixed. Jointville wants no blood poisonings, no infections.

The doctor puts men who want a job through a physical examination, as in the army. Try his nerve reactions. We want only the best men here, the youngest, the fastest.

Why not?

We pay the best wages, don't we?

The policeman in the plant has a special job. That's queer.

It is like this. Now and then the big boss passes through. He selects a man off the belt.

'You're fired.'

'Why?'

'You know.'

Now and then a man goes off his nut. He goes fantod. He howls and shouts. He grabs up a hammer.

A stream of crazy profanity comes from his lips.

There is Jointville. That is the central thing. That controls the belt.

The belt controls me.

It moves.

It moves.

It moves.

I've tried to keep up.

I tell you I have been keeping up.

Jointville is God.

Jointville controls the belt.

The belt is God.

God has rejected me.

You're fired.

Sometimes a man, fired like that, goes nutty. He gets dangerous. A strong policeman on hand knocks him down, takes him out.

You walk within certain definite white lines.

It is calculated that a man, rubbing automobile bodies with pumice, makes thirty thousand and twenty-one arm-strokes per day. The difference between thirty thousand and twenty-one and twenty-eight thousand and four will tell a vivid story of profits or loss at Jointville.

Do you think things are settled at Jointville, or at the assembling plants of the Bogel car, scattered all over America? Do you think men know how fast the belt can be made to move, what the ultimate, the final pace will be, can be?

Certainly not.

There are experts studying the nerves of men, the movements of men. They are watching, watching. Calculations are always going on. The thing is to produce goods and more goods at less cost. Keep the standard up. Increase the pace a little.

Stop waste.

Calculate everything.

A man walking to and from his work between white lines saves steps. There is a tremendous science of lost motion not perfectly calculated yet.

More goods at less cost.

Increase the pace.

Keep up standards.

It is so you advance civilization.

In the Bogel assembling plants, as at Jointville itself, there isn't any laughter. No one stops work to play. No one fools around or throws things, as they used to do in the old factories. That is why Bogel is able to put the old-fashioned factories, one by one, out of business.

It is all a matter of calculation. You feel it when you go in. You feel rigid lines. You feel movement.

You feel a strange tension in the air. There is a quiet, terrible intensity.

The belt moves. It keeps moving. The day I was there a number of young boys had come in. They had been sent by a Bogel car dealer, away back somewhere in the country.

They had driven in during the night, and were to drive Bogel cars back over country roads to some dealer. A good many Bogel cars go out to dealers from the assembling plants, driven out by boys like that.

Such boys, driving all night, fooling along the road, getting no sleep.

They have a place for them to wait for the cars in the Bogel assembling plants. You have been at dog shows and have seen how prize dogs are exhibited, each in his nice clean cage.

They have nice clean cages like that for country boys who drive in to Bogel assembling plants to get cars.

The boys come in. There is a place to lie down in there. It is clean. After the boy goes into his cage a gate is closed. He is fastened in.

If a country boy, sleepy like that, waiting for his car, wandered about in a plant he might get hurt.

There might be a damage suit, all sorts of things.

Better to calculate everything. Be careful. Be exact.

Jointville thought of that. Jointville thinks of everything. It is the centre of power, the new mystery.

Every year in America Jointville comes nearer and nearer being the new centre. Men nowadays do not look to Washington. They look to Jointville.

Lift up thine eyes, men.

Lift up thine eyes.

## READERS' REPORTS

*The Birth of Western Painting*, by Robert Byron and David Talbot Rice. (Routledge. £2 2s.) Readers of *The Station*, one of the most engaging travel books of recent years, must have wondered what Mr. Byron and Mr. Talbot Rice would do with the harvest they gathered among the monasteries of Mount Athos. This book is the answer: the trials which Mr. Rice underwent, wrapped in a black cloth and perched on a tottering ladder, have borne fruit in a series of plates representing the main types of Byzantine iconography from the beginning to the sixteenth century. The pictures, which are admirably clear, both in outline and detail, are the evidence for Mr. Byron's history of Interpretational Painting. Whether the bridge which he has thrown from Byzantium to Cézanne will prove to be the lost highway of European art, and the four centuries from Masaccio to the Impressionists only a by-pass, is a matter for art-historians and the future to determine. The author has a firm grasp of the main issue, Representation against Interpretation, in its historic setting, the Iconoclastic controversy, and the process of his argument is exceedingly persuasive. His specific thesis, that El Greco was not an astigmatic Westerner (or worse), but a normal Easterner using light and colour as the Byzantines had been trained to use them, had been, though vaguely, apprehended before. Here are the proofs: the 'Agony' and 'The Cardinal', in the National Gallery, seen among Mr. Rice's photographs, at once fall into place as Byzantine masterpieces. But the theme of the book is wider than this: it involves the whole problem of painting as the visual apprehension

of Reality, a topic which cannot be dealt with in the current language of art criticism, and one which it is not easy to handle in any language without falling into a mystical nebulosity of words. One of the most conspicuous merits of this book is a certain pungent gravity in the writing which never loses itself and never lets the treatment fall below the significance of the theme. The publishers are to be congratulated, too, on a fine piece of book-production, at a price which, in all the circumstances, is most reasonable.

*Coleridge as Philosopher*, by J. H. Muirhead. (Allen & Unwin. 12s. 6d.) This is a book which needed writing, and Professor Muirhead, as might have been expected, has written it very well. It is not easy reading: in substance it is a long extract from a projected History of Idealism, and it assumes in the reader a considerable knowledge of recent philosophy and its technical language. But it discharges its double purpose excellently: the author has succeeded, by a combination of analysis and sympathy, in reducing the Coleridgean nebula to a system, and in indicating its relations to the old sensationalism, against which it was a revolt, and modern voluntarism, of which it was a premonition. If anything, it is too neat. I could not help feeling at times that if Coleridge's philosophy had really been as coherent as Professor Muirhead makes out, not even Coleridge could have made it so unintelligible. But in an exposition of so fragmentary and elusive a writer this is a fault on the right side. There is, I think, something more in Coleridge's thought (particularly in his psychology) than appears here, just as there was more in Coleridge's life than appears in Dyke Campbell's *Narrative*. But the two can be set side by side as books to



which all other aspects of Coleridge can be referred.

The book is timely, because a type of philosophy very similar to Coleridge's is in the ascendant once more. He himself was a revolutionary with unappeasable cravings for those personal relations with a forgiving Deity which the traditional religion offered. The combination made him the Converted Pirate of Liberal Anglicanism in the decades when bishops spent their lives hoping against hope that the Faith would not turn out to be quite so hollow as it sounded. By the other side, by Leslie Stephen and Alfred Benn, he was in consequence regarded as the great exemplar of Anglican insincerity. These are old controversies, and an antiquated point of view. Idealism, released from professional obligations, and invigorated by two generations of conflict with the Darwinians, is a much less smug philosophy than it was sixty years ago. Coleridge, working his way through Hartley and Berkeley (Derwent Coleridge was born just too late to be christened Spinoza), anticipates the history of the later nineteenth century, working through Spencer and Bradley. Coleridge found salvation in Germany, but, unhappily, he had found consolation in opium first. A dejected man, his mastery of language fatally impaired, he spent his last thirty years in an ineffectual struggle to give shape to a philosophy of which it is really impossible to say how much was reflection and how much reminiscence of other men's writings. Contemporaries were aware of an intense activity going on within, but what it was all about no one knew. Now that the manuscripts have been competently examined, it is evident that there was more shape to Coleridge's mind than had appeared from his published fragments, or the records of his disciples. They display—at any rate in Professor Muir-

head's exposition—a capacity for sustained thinking which will to many readers come as something of a surprise. Whatever its value as philosophy, for example, Coleridge's treatment of the problem of evil is a remarkable feat of close reasoning. It is the most striking thing in Professor Muirhead's book.

It was not all opium. If Coleridge's gift for language had remained with him, if it had been transposed into the other harmony of prose, one may still doubt whether he could have articulated all he had to say. The mental material on which he worked was of the most evanescent and fugitive kind. His revolt from the materialists was the revolt of a poet; his philosophy rested on his experience as a poet. He had known what creation felt like and he saw the world as an eternal poem. States of feeling and, still more, states of will, became the data of his thought: 'Hartley tottered', and Hume and Locke came tumbling after. Eighteenth-century rationalism shrank to an episode, and philosophy and poetry together returned to the romantic and Platonic way. But psychology had evolved no technique for distinguishing and registering these subtler grades of consciousness and desire, and Coleridge could do no more than indicate, in borrowed and inapplicable jargon, the lines on which his philosophy would some day be developed. He may have thought he saw it before him as he thought he saw the second part of *Christabel*. He could only have made it visible to others by remaining a poet, and if he had remained a poet—as, indeed, he half admitted to De Quincey—he would never have needed to be a philosopher. Once he had moved so easily in that world of Imagination and Reason lying just beyond the confines of Sense and the Practical Understanding, and to the end those who heard him talk felt

that he was moving there still. He could make no map of it and bring back no report, and the ablest exposition can be nothing more than a hydrographer's version of the Perilous Seas. But it is something to have that.

The 'To-day and To-morrow' series is like a good cocktail-bar: when one's mind is sluggish, any volume of it will whet one's appetite for thinking. It may be a pernicious habit; it is certainly a very pleasant one. The flavour of the latest volume is delicious, while it lasts, but, like all delicate flavours, it is too evanescent to last very long. Mr. Lyall discusses good-humouredly and with considerable wit all, or almost all, of the curious taboos which the English conveniently label as *It Isn't Done* (Kegan Paul. 2s. 6d.). This is a vast subject indeed, one that would easily fill the pages of another *Golden Bough*. Mr. Lyall, however, has only filled about ninety pages, though he has managed in that short space to convey to his readers a pretty good idea of the complicated system of convention with which we are hedged in. His method resembles that of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, the method, that is to say, of the detached and slightly puzzled observer, relating the odd behaviour of 'The Islanders', and seeking vainly for some rational explanation of it. Perhaps it is impossible to rationalize taboos under one definition, and Mr. Lyall has not probed very deeply into the ethical origins from which they arise. To have done so would have carried him far beyond his intention, which is to put his readers in the way of thinking them out for themselves. Briefly, and at times hilariously, he examines the body-taboo, the sex-taboo, the lavatory-taboo, the snob-taboo, and the even more interesting anti-taboos which correspond to each of them.

And he shows, with the help of ludicrous examples from his own experience, how the latter end by becoming as much taboos as those they set out to destroy. Thus, in certain circles, it has become imperative for very rich people to announce that they do not know where their next meal is coming from, whereas in the days when the poverty-taboo was in force, the mention of poverty was sufficient to ostracize a man from 'good society'. In the same way, no really emancipated young woman can afford to risk her reputation for open-mindedness by omitting to introduce into a conversation with a complete stranger an account of her own and her friends' sexual experiences. And so the world goes on; the future of the taboo is the anti-taboo, and the future of the anti-taboo

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is the taboo once again—a perfect vicious circle. It is never easy to tell the ingredients of a good cocktail, but there is nothing poisonous or unpleasant in this one, which seems to be concocted for the most part of champagne.

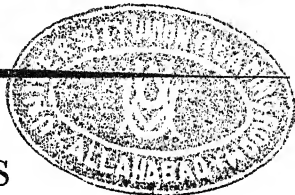
*Brother to Bert*, by Charlotte Haldane. (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d.) This is the story of Bert and Len, the 'identical' twins, up to the time when one of them brains his mistress with a brandy bottle. Then Bert, the guilty brother, flees to Paris; Len is arrested, but is never in much danger, for his brother's finger-prints have been found upon the bottle. A Cambridge don is summoned from the vasty deep—the biological laboratory—to do the sleuthing; he lets off, in a deep, booming voice, a great deal of information about twins, and finally, with promptings from his wife (a journalist) tracks down the wretched Bert, who escapes him by an overdose of veronal. The brothers are, unfortunately, dull dogs, and their lives, though very low, are at the same time monotonous. The story is uncertain in direction, and has a tendency to drag. And Mrs. Haldane has been careful not to give her characters (except the Professor and his wife) too much to recommend them. But her manner is lively and businesslike; there are amusing moments, and one or two really sympathetic scenes.



# LIFE AND LETTERS

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F. L. LUCAS



## THE POET OF PROSE

It is extraordinary what prosaic people poets can be; or, if you like, what prosaic people can be poets. This paradox has long become a platitude; yet there are moments when it can still make us rub astonished eyes. We may remind ourselves that even Byron is most unlikely to be pacing his chamber in the throes of *Manfred* the morning we meet him; as Byron himself said, 'I never can get people to understand that poetry is the expression of excited emotion, and that there is no such thing as a life of passion any more than a continual earthquake. . . . Besides, who would ever shave themselves in such a state?' It is obvious; and yet we can sympathize so well with Mr. Coolidge of Boston in his ill-concealed disappointment at the author of *Childe Harold*—'having expected to meet a misanthropical gentleman in wolfskin breeches, answering in fierce monosyllables, instead of a man of this world'. Yet, in fact, few poets have lived their part as romantically as Byron; shall we ever grow used to the far wider contrast between *Tintern Abbey* and the humdrum, horse-faced personage who wrote it, between *The Ancient Mariner* and the flaccid, snub-nosed countenance of Coleridge?



There is often an equally incongruous contrast between peoples or landscapes and the literature they produce. How much more poetry the reader of history might naturally expect from the country of François I and Bayard, of Napoleon I and Napoleon III, than from the country of Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell, of George IV and Queen Victoria! No doubt such generalizations are too easy: by choosing one's examples tactfully one can prove almost anything. Matthew Arnold, discussing in this way the Celtic and Teutonic elements in our literature, reached the most curious conclusions by contrasting as racially characteristic the worst doggerel he could find on an English tombstone with some elaborate triad from early Welsh poetry. Still, it is surely not too rash to say that 'John Bull' has always been a far more prosaic, far less passionate and imaginative figure than 'la belle France'; and yet, for some reason, it is from north of the Channel that the richer poetry has come.

Or consider the effect of landscape. To generations the Alps have seemed the embodiment of the sublime and beautiful; few would claim that for London and the Midlands. And yet, name the six chief poets of Switzerland—there, indeed, would be a test of general knowledge. And how many poets have ever lived in the real Arcadia, heart-rendingly beautiful as its mountains remain to this day? Whereas Cambridge, set in the grey sobriety of its fenlands, has, as we all know, been a nest of nightingales for centuries.

Is there some law of reaction to explain this paradox? Is it like the tendency of the dwellers in flat lands, from Babel to Venetia and Flanders, to pile up heaven-piercing towers? Shall we say that, as only the hardest

of plants can survive in a Sahara, so there are no poets so poetic as those born into some Philistia; and retire with a glowing sense of having added to the great store of general truths?

Alas, these are half-truths at best. If the prosaic English have produced great poetry, the prosaic Swiss have not; and if the natural beauty of Switzerland has failed to produce it, what on the other hand of the natural beauty of Greece—which seems so naturally reflected in the beauty of Greek literature? Our generalizations collapse; all except this simple one—that however dull and prosaic a country, a race, or an individual may at first sight seem, we can never be sure that they will not suddenly blossom into poetry. For it is a strange plant, that sows itself in the most unlooked-for places: like an ash-tree springing up on a chimney stack, or a swallow nesting in the cab of a railway engine. Picture, for instance, a human being with not much imagination, not much ear for verbal music, not much passion for the beauty of nature—fonder, by his own admission, of watching faces in the street; in temper a scientist rather than an artist, and indifferent to painting, music, or architecture; preferring ‘in botany grasses, the most useful but least ornamental; in minerals, the earths and sands; in entomology, the minuter insects’; and given at one time to roaming the sea-shore (Parnasian occupation!) in search of drowned dogs to dissect. See him, to complete the picture, as by profession an unsuccessful surgeon, then a clergyman of the Church of England noted for his strong sermons against ‘enthusiasm’. How many of us would subscribe very hopefully to a forthcoming edition of such a person’s poems? Do you ask more details—his origin? He was the child of a tax-collector with mathematical leanings, and of a

publican's widow. The surroundings of his childhood? A drab and straggling street, bounded by a monotony of grey shingle and grey sea on one side, on the other by a barren heath and a mud-bound marsh, with dark brown water oozing slowly down its dykes. The society he mixed with—by necessity, if not by choice? The provincials of a petty port; London tradespeople; the stiff correctness of an eighteenth-century ducal castle; or else such country types as these described by his son—‘One was a jolly old farmer, with much of the person and humour of Falstaff, a face as rosy as brandy could make it, and an eye teeming with subdued merriment; for he had that prime quality of a joker, superficial gravity: the other was a relative of the family, a wealthy yeoman, middle-aged, thin, and muscular. He was a bachelor, and famed for his indiscriminate attachment to all who bore the name of woman—young or aged, clean or dirty, a lady or a gipsy, it mattered not to him: all were equally admired. He had peopled the village green; and it was remarked, that, whoever was the mother, the children might be recognized in an instant to belong to him. Such was the strength of his constitution, that, though he seldom went to bed sober, he retained a clear eye and a stentorian voice to his eightieth year, and coursed when he was ninety. . . . Another of the sisterhood was Miss Waldron, late of Tamworth—dear, good-humoured, hearty, masculine Miss Waldron, who could sing a jovial song like a fox-hunter, and like him I had almost said toss a glass: and yet there was such an air of high *ton*, and such intellect mingled with these manners, that the perfect lady was not veiled for a moment—no, not when with a face rosy-red, and an eye beaming with mirth, she would seize a cup and sing “Toby Fillpot”, glorying as it were

in her own jollity.' Here, to be sure, were haunts for Fielding; but hardly for Apollo. And yet after a century and a quarter, crowded with the work of younger writers, George Crabbe still keeps his place and his power to please.

No wonder if he was often a prosaic poet: the wonder is that, with such antecedents and surroundings and qualities of mind, he was a poet at all. How prosaic he can be had better be admitted at once. Those who explore him must be prepared to drop at any moment into abysses of bathos. Again and again he invites that gibe of Alphonse Daudet at some poetaster: 'Ça un poète!—tout au plus de l'infanterie montée':

A quiet, simple man was *Abel Keene*,  
He meant no harm, nor did he often mean:  
He kept a school of loud rebellious boys,  
And growing old, grew nervous with the noise.

The timid girls, half dreading their design,  
Dip the small foot in the retarded brine.

And I was thankful for the moral sight,  
That soberised the vast and wild delight.

It is as bad as Wordsworth at his worst. Yet there is a great deal more in Crabbe than doggerel. His poetry and his life are both alike in this: they seem monotonous and drab. They are; but look closer; mixed with their grey texture are threads of deeper and of brighter colour—flashes of quiet heroism; sorrows felt passionately, though the words are few; and a lifelong loyalty to truth, sometimes sad, sometimes sardonic. Truthfulness—that is Crabbe's master quality, and the secret of his lasting appeal. He did not deal in beatific visions; he trailed no

clouds of glory; he has no claims to be called 'great'. But whether it was a dyke of muddy water in a marsh or the brooding memories of an old woman at her cottage door, he had no common power of sight, and insight, and of saying what he saw.

His life, indeed, is very like one of his own tales. Under its sober surface lies both grimness and romance. Already as he grew into boyhood his quiet home was darkened by the sombre rages which began to grow upon his father, to the point of throwing the crockery about the room, until his wife came to dread the sound of his returning footsteps. Strange destinies, too, awaited the poet's younger brothers. The third son became captain of a slave-ship; one day his black cargo broke loose, mastered the vessel, and set their white captors adrift in an open boat; Captain Crabbe and his men were never heard of more. A younger brother still was captured by the Spaniards, settled in Mexico, and grew rich; his wealth reminded the Church that he was a heretic; he was forced to leave his wife, children, and all he possessed, and flee to Honduras, where he founded, if not a new fortune, at all events a new family. For it appears from the *Belize Advertiser* of January 1840 that, fantastic as it sounds, the author of *The Parish Register* was the probably unsuspecting uncle of a colony of little black Crabbes beyond the Atlantic. His own boyhood was uneventful; but the touch of poetry was already there. His father, though by profession a revenue-collector (like the father of Horace, two thousand years before) and in charge of the salt-duties at Aldborough, had tastes not only for mathematics, but for verse as well, and would read Milton and Young in the evenings to his family; further, he took in *Martin's Philosophical Magazine*, a journal with a Poets'



Corner which the father flung aside and the son learnt by heart. This boyish habit has left its mark on that curious poem Crabbe wrote years after, called *The Newspaper*, with its description of such newspaper poets:

This Poets' Corner is the place they choose,  
A fatal nursery for an infant Muse;  
Unlike that corner where true poets lie,  
These cannot live, and *they* shall never die.

Fortunately, Crabbe's own 'infant Muse' found a healthier nursery than this elsewhere in Aldborough, among its old wives and ancient mariners. From them the future story-teller was already in his boyhood gathering his material:

They told of days where many goes to one—  
Such days as ours; and how a larger sun,  
Red, but not flaming, roll'd with motion slow,  
On the world's edge, but never dropp'd below.

Nor was it only the old who found in this quiet child a listener:

There were fond girls that took me to their side  
To tell the story how their lovers died.

In the same way, with the same already eager human interest, he picked acquaintance with lonely shepherds on Aldborough Heath, and with smugglers down the coast. If Crabbe's schooling was scanty and his culture never wide, he early learnt things that books could never have taught him,

And all that boys acquire whom men neglect.

Next followed apprenticeship to a series of surgeons; a rough experience apt to include helping the surgeon's



ploughboy at odd moments. Then, at seventeen, came romance. He fell in love with Sarah Elmy. The poems he addressed 'To Mira' seem starchy and sickly enough to modern taste; it only shows how rash it is to accuse writers of 'insincerity': seldom has love proved truer. To win her he battled for twelve years against discouragement, poverty, and debt. Twice he tried to make his way in London. His first attempt was in 1776-7, as a surgeon; but he was too poor to pay for proper teaching, and his efforts at self-help led to little result—except that his landlady, finding he had a dead baby in his cupboard, became convinced that he had dug up her William, buried the week before, and was only prevented from haling him to the Mansion House by the production of the child with its face, fortunately, still intact. It is clear that Crabbe was even less made for medicine than Keats; the idea of being called on to do a serious operation was a nightmare to him; and after two years' more struggling with his profession at Aldborough he decided to abandon it and take the decisive step, as it proved, of his whole life.

Here again the prose of Crabbe's career is lit up for an instant by a flash of poetry; for this decision was made by him on a gloomy winter's day in 1779, on the bleak Marsh Hill above Aldborough, as he stood and gazed at a muddy pool there called 'the Leech-pond'. On that spot, with as much 'Resolution and Independence' as Wordsworth's own Leech-gatherer, Crabbe determined to stake all on his poetry. The next April, aged twenty-five, with three pounds in his pocket, he sailed on a smack for London, where, just ten years before him, Chatterton had likewise sought his fortune, and found his fate. Fortunately Chatterton was not even a name to Crabbe until after his arrival there.

In that Purgatory he suffered a whole year. His journal makes moving reading, with its mixture of a simplicity that hopes to conquer the world of letters by means of Epistles to Prince William Henry and Epistles from the Devil, and a courage that refuses to despair at the obdurate deafness of peers and publishers alike, of North and Shelburne, Dodsley and Becket; even when the writer is reduced to fourpence-halfpenny in the world. Only at moments there is wrung from him a cry of wretchedness: 'Oh Sally, how I want you!' Summer came; amid its heats he watched the flames of the Gordon Riots licking up the walls of Newgate; a barren winter followed, then a hopeless spring. A debtors' gaol was gaping for him, when he played his last card and wrote an appeal to Burke. He left it at Burke's door, together with a copy of his poem, *The Library*; then in the anguish of his suspense paced up and down Westminster Bridge (again we think of Wordsworth) all night long. That night the tide had turned.

Struck by the letter (as well he might be), still more by the man himself, Burke took instant action, although himself in the thick of a political crisis. He introduced the young surgeon from Suffolk to the greatest of the day, to Fox, to Reynolds, to Johnson; arranged for the publication of *The Library*; arranged for the ordination of its author and his appointment to a curacy at Aldborough. Then, when Crabbe's native town showed itself ill-disposed to take the returned saltmaster's son for its spiritual shepherd, this ever-patient patron had him made instead chaplain to the Duke of Rutland. Thenceforth Crabbe's long life flowed evenly to its close. *The Village* appeared successfully in 1783; the same year saw him wedded at last to the woman he had toiled so

patiently to win. In 1785 followed *The Newspaper*. Then for twenty-two years, from the age of thirty to fifty-one, he published nothing. Glad to escape from his too aristocratic chaplaincy to a country parsonage, he spent his quiet days in botanizing, preaching against the enthusiasm of the Methodists, rearing a family, and delighting its youthful members by making periodical bonfires in his garden of massive manuscripts of verse, to say nothing of three novels—mountains of paper whose bulk, if burnt indoors, would have endangered the house. Sermons he composed with less ardour; in later life, at least, he would preach the same ones at two-year intervals—a characteristically commonsense arrangement. ‘As like Parson Adams’ (said Lord Chancellor Thurlow) ‘as twelve to the dozen’, he maintained calm, but firm relations with his parishioners; tithe-days called from him no elaborate ceremony, but a blunt ‘I must have some money, gentlemen’. His life makes a sleepy record, even without the opium he took for his digestion in his latter years. And yet under this tranquillity there still lurked deeper feelings—wild impulses like that sudden uncontrollable longing for the sea which made him one day mount his horse, ride sixty miles to the Lincoln coast, enter the waves, and so return; and secret troubles, like the melancholia which attacked his wife at intervals from 1796 till her death in 1813. There is something very pitiful in the words written by him on one of her old letters: ‘Nothing can be more sincere than this, nothing more reasonable and affectionate; and yet happiness was denied.’ And yet a truer epitaph on his long love-story lies, perhaps, in those other lines he wrote on the paper wrapping of his dead wife’s wedding-ring, clumsy, yet moving in their sincerity:

The ring so worn as you behold,  
So thin, so pale, is yet of gold;  
The passion such it was to prove—  
Worn with life's care, love yet was love.

Had Crabbe died at fifty, he would be to-day as obscure a figure as Tickell or Parnell. *Inebriety*, *The Candidate*, *The Library*, *The Newspaper*, and even *The Village* would scarcely have kept his memory alive. But in 1807 this poet of a past age presented himself before the new generation with a volume of poems containing, besides his previous work, *The Parish Register* and *Sir Eustace Gray*. Success encouraged him, and *The Borough* followed in 1810, the *Tales* in 1812, *Tales of the Hall* in 1819. With surprising ease and swiftness this old man, who had been born under George II, established his position as a leading poet in the world of Napoleon and Wellington, Scott and Byron. He made the acquaintance of Scott, Campbell, Rogers, Bowles, Moore, and Wordsworth; he had become rector of comfortable Trowbridge, with his grandchildren growing up round him; and yet all was not well. He suffered from being too old, or else not old enough; the lover, long ago, of Sarah Elmy still felt woman's charm; he seemed terribly alone in the bustling streets of his prosperous parish. 'I cannot bear to belong to nobody.' He tried to satisfy himself with feminine friendships, but they had a way of hovering unhappily on the brink of something more. 'I have,' he writes to Mrs. Leadbeater, 'though at considerable distances, six female friends, unknown to each other, but all dear, very dear to me.' The distances did not always remain so considerable. In his sixtieth year he was even accepted by one young woman, only to recoil himself on second

thoughts. That was unfortunate; but he was needlessly contrite, one feels, at having thereby caused Miss Ridout to reject a young man, who was 'an excellent match in every respect except a certain weakness of intellect'. He did not, however, escape the criticism of others. 'The cake was no doubt very good,' observed one lady, 'but there was too much sugar to cut through in getting at it.' An old squire was blunter: 'Damme, Sir, the very first time Crabbe dined at my house, he made love to my sister.' It is an old story—laurelled age and laughing youth, Corneille and Mademoiselle du Parc, Goethe and Bettina, Ibsen and his Princess of Orangia: it would be very comical if it were not tragic. Yet it is strange to find something so naive and *doucereux* in Crabbe of all men, 'Nature's sternest painter, yet the best'. So much harder is it to sum up a human being than biographers often suppose. It was no mere softening of old age: the sturdy resolution of forty years before was still his; in 1818, when he supported the unpopular candidate at Trowbridge and a hostile mob threatened to tear his chaise and him to pieces if he went to the poll, the old rector replied that they might kill him if they chose, but while he lived he would vote, and passed through their midst unharmed. A commonsense Liberal to the last, he died on the eve of the Reform Bill in 1832.

Naive, yet shrewd; straightforward, yet sardonic; blunt, yet tender; quiet, yet passionate; realistic, yet romantic—such was the man, and such is his poetry. The first impression is of a prosaic naturalist, both in the scientific and in the literary sense of that word. He botanizes and entomologizes, so to speak, in his observation of nature and human nature; with a preference for hemlock over roses, for moths over butterflies. He is more interested in a

flatworm than a python. He shows the absorption of an eager student of medicine in a really bad case. Hence the familiar phrase about 'Pope in worsted stockings'; hence the complaint of Wordsworth that 'Crabbe's verses are in no sense poetry' and 'nineteen-twentieths of his pictures are mere matters of fact'; of Coleridge, that there was in him 'an absolute defect of the high imagination'; of Landor's Porson that he 'wrote with a twopenny nail . . . on mud walls'.

It is an understandable attitude. Crabbe is more than a verse Defoe, but he is that in part. It is not necessarily a weakness: Crabbe's Romantic contemporaries and successors would have been none the worse if their own pictures had more often been 'matters of fact'. He may lack 'the high imagination', but at least he had, what they often wanted, that lower imagination which can see and make others see, not things that never were, but things that are. Crabbe, indeed, belonged to that class of human beings of whom we may say that pink spectacles make them see red. They would rather face the worst truths than pretty illusions:

Come, search within, nor sight nor smell regard;  
The true physician walks the foulest ward.

So Crabbe set out to tear the honeysuckle off Goldsmith's  
Deserted Village.

Since vice the world subdued, and waters drown'd,  
Auburn and Eden can no more be found.

It was not that Goldsmith had never known hard times himself: he had fiddled his vagabond way across Europe; it was a difference, not of experience, but of



temperament. In this reaction against Goldsmith Crabbe first found himself, just as Fielding had begun by loathing and parodying Richardson.

Then shall I dare these real ills to hide  
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride? . . .  
By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,  
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.

The style is the faded convention of a hundred and fifty years ago; the sentiment might be that of a modern poet rebelling against Tennyson, or against the Georgians. We can understand how Johnson then, and Hardy a century later, felt at once the appeal of a mind so cleared of cant; indeed, I had already found myself wondering whether Crabbe must not have been one of Hardy's favourite poets, even before biography disclosed that from him Hardy derived his own first impulse towards realism. After all, this is an ancient school of writing—older, no doubt, even than the day when the Muses met Hesiod keeping sheep on Mount Helicon and taught him that they could tell truth as well as fiction, and paint life's harsh realities as well as Homer's high romance. Indeed, it is worth opening Crabbe and Hesiod side by side to see how vigorously a certain type of rustic temper can persist across the division of seas and centuries—disillusioned, sharp-tongued, shrewd-witted, yet with a sense of beauty of its own. The bleak Thracian gale that pipes across Hesiod's Boeotia echoes the north-easter that nips East Anglia; the Greek shrew

Who, though her wedded husband be a stout man and  
a sage,  
With never a fire will roast him into a raw old age,

bears a family resemblance, despite three thousand years, to her Suffolk sister:

Twelve heavy years this patient soul sustain'd  
This wasp's attacks, and then her praise obtain'd,  
Grav'd on a marble tomb, where he at peace remain'd.

Much nearer home, Crabbe invites a more obvious comparison with Cowper: there is the same fondness for quiet English country, the same fondness, alas, for mere prose in metre. As a letter-writer, Cowper must stand far higher: as a poet of landscape, and of human character, he seems to me inferior. He lacked both Crabbe's knowledge and Crabbe's strength; indeed, the mixture in him of maiden lady and hunted sheep, despite all its pathos, ends by tiring the patience. Then there is that other far greater poet of the country and the poor, who in his flights of inspiration soars into heavens far out of sight of Aldborough Heath, but also, when inspiration leaves him, flounders almost lower, even, than Crabbe himself—Wordsworth. Little comparison is possible, but there is one difference of some interest in its effects—the difference between Wordsworth's blank verse and Crabbe's couplet. For grand moments in the grand manner, blank verse is doubtless unsurpassable; but for general purposes it tends to lapse, as Goldsmith already saw before Wordsworth's day or Cowper's, into 'a disgusting solemnity'. With all its faults, the couplet is far less subject to that failing. Crabbe was slovenly. He wrote too fast—six times as fast as Virgil—thirty lines a day. He never learnt what Boileau taught Racine, not only to rhyme, but 'rimer difficilement'. As sure as fate, a 'boy' in Crabbe is doomed, if to no other 'employ', then to a 'hoy'. None the less for his purposes he chose the right measure.

He also learnt, more slowly, to choose the right method for his gifts. It was in vivid and individual detail, not in vague generalizations, that his power lay. The sublime may be vague, as the mountains and the heavens seem but the vaster for mist and cloud; but the village brook, the woodland pool, need clarity to be at their best. From *Libraries* and *Villages* and *Boroughs* he passed more and more to tales of individual lives—from the general to the particular, from the static to the dynamic. Even in his earlier work the most vital passages had been, apart from the landscapes, the sketches of characters like Phoebe Dawson or the Widow Goe; and the later letters of the *Borough* are indistinguishable from the *Tales*.

In these it is not the plots that are striking—they are adequate, seldom more; a village girl is seduced by a footman, a village coquette passes through all the slow stages from ballroom to almshouse, a young man is entrapped by a young minx in a nobleman's household. What remains outstanding is the truth of detail in the characters; especially the pictures of degeneration, 'little by little'—for instance, the prim Parish Clerk, a sort of Malvolio, who stoops in the end to steal from the offertory-bag. Such gradual progresses of a soul, upward or downward, are too long to quote; but Crabbe's gift of catching a situation or a human type in a couplet or so lends itself better to the purpose. There is, for instance, the lovers' quarrel:

The youth, repulsed, to one more mild convey'd  
His heart, and smil'd on the remorseless maid;  
The maid, remorseless in her pride, the while  
Despis'd the insult and return'd the smile;

or the village gossips:

Theirs is that art, which English wives alone  
Profess—a boast and privilege their own . . .  
When they engage the tongue, the eye, the ear,  
Reply when listening, and when speaking, hear;

or the charity-boy in the workhouse:

There was he pinch'd and pitied, thump'd and fed,  
And duly took his beating and his bread;

or again, we see the gardener's wife standing proudly  
upon her privileges:

'Why "Lonicera" wilt thou name thy child?'  
I ask'd the Gardener's wife in accents mild.  
'We have the right', replied the sturdy dame,  
And Lonicera was the infant's name.

Miranda the blue-stockings aspires to mathematics:

She thought indeed the higher parts sublime;  
But then they took a monstrous deal of time.

The tactful wife leads her husband with a velvet glove:

She only begg'd to rule in small affairs,  
And ease her wedded lord of common cares,  
Till he at length thought every care was small,  
Beneath his notice, and she had them all.

The toad-eating nephew waits to inherit from his aunt:

'They taught you nothing; are you not, at best,'  
Said the proud Dame, 'a trifle and a jest?'  
Confess you are a fool!' He bow'd and he confess'd.

This vex'd him much, but could not always last:  
The dame is buried, and the trial past.

This simple country clergyman, it appears, was something of a wit; at times, a bitter one:

'I speak my mind, I love the truth,' quoth he;  
Till 'twas his fate that useful truth to find,  
'Tis sometimes prudent not to speak the mind.

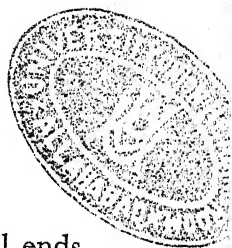
'How well my father liv'd!' she says. 'How well,  
My dear, your father's creditors could tell.'

To those who do not know Crabbe intimately, it must always seem most extraordinary that Jane Austen should have said she could imagine herself as Mrs. Crabbe.<sup>1</sup> It seems too like a silk-gloved hand clasping a woollen one. And yet, after reading a piece like *Flirtation: A Dialogue*, the wonder is rather where this blunt parson acquired such malicious lightness of touch. This piece is a conversation between a young lady, who has not been precisely a Penelope, and her confidante, pending the return of her betrothed Ulysses; and its disquisition on the Art of Weeping makes a pretty pendant to that on the Art of Swooning or Running Mad in Jane Austen's *Love and Freindship*:

To touch him nearer, and to hold him fast,  
Have a few tears *in petto* at the last;  
But this with care! For 'tis a point of doubt,  
If you should end with weeping or without.

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Elton quotes an amusing passage from one of her letters: 'I have never seen the death of Mrs. Crabbe . . . Poor woman! I will comfort him as well as I can, but I do not undertake to be good to her children . . . she had better not leave any.'

'Tis true you much affect him by your pain,  
But he may want to prove his power again;  
And, then, it spoils the look, and hurts the eyes—  
A girl is never handsome when she cries.  
Take it for granted, in a general way,  
The more you weep for men, the more you may.  
Save your resources; for though now you cry  
With good effect, you may not by and by.  
It is a knack; and there are those that weep  
Without emotion, that a man may sleep;  
Others disgust—'tis genius, not advice,  
That will avail us in a thing so nice.



But, alas, these silken nets are spread in vain—all ends with the arrival of a letter announcing that the errant Ulysses has himself succumbed in marriage to a Circe in Guernsey. It is worth noting what a way the couplet has of begetting wit; imagine the above in blank verse, or recall the mountainous gambols of *The Prelude*. Not that Crabbe cannot be atrocious; only, when a writer shows such conscious humour, it is hard to be sure how far the humour is unconscious even when he writes:

Something had happen'd wrong about a bill  
That was not drawn with true mercantile skill;  
So to amend it I was told to go  
And seek the firm of Clutterbuck and Co.;

or again:

We saw my Lord, and Lady Jane was there,  
And said to Johnson, 'Johnson, take a chair'.

Impossible, you may say—the bathos must be absolutely deliberate! The reader of Crabbe at large, however, and



of those almost illiterate letters of his old age (so hard to reconcile with the fine letter to Burke), can never feel sure, as with Jane Austen we feel sure, that he knows what he is doing. At times it seems as if literary English were something of a foreign tongue to him; there are lapses in his grammar; so there are, for that matter, in Jane Austen's; but where she paints on her 'two inches of ivory', he works more crudely on a tile from the domestic hearth. There is, however, still another link between him and the authoress of *Northanger Abbey* in the fun both make of romantic extravaganzas and the goblin posterity of Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe:

banditti who, in forest wide  
And cavern vast, indignant virgins hide;  
Who, hemm'd with bands of sturdiest rogues about,  
Find some strange succour, and come virgins out.

(Which reads—so little do human appetites change—strangely like an account of a modern film melodrama.) Yet there is also a difference. Crabbe mocked romanticism of this sort, but he had also loved it in his time, and devoured it. He is a realist, like Jane Austen, but the realist of a wider, as well as lower, world; and a realist far less single-minded and content to take life as it is. He laughs at dreams; but he envies them.

Go on, then, Son of Vision! Still pursue  
Thy airy dreams; the world is dreaming too.  
Ambition's lofty views, the pomp of state,  
The pride of wealth, the splendour of the great,  
Stripp'd of their mask, their cares and troubles  
known,  
Are visions far less happy than thy own.

The lesson of life, in tale after tale of his, is simply to forget romance and accept reality; one of his heroines will deliberately school herself out of an unwise passion:

I sought my remedies for these;  
I suffer'd common things my mind to please,  
And common pleasures; seldom walk'd alone,  
Nor when the moon upon the waters shone;  
But then my candles lit, my window closed,  
My needle took, and with my neighbours prosed:  
And in one year—nay, ere the end of one—  
My labour ended, and my love was done.

How sensible, and successful; and yet what a sad success, though not without its dignity! But such success was not to be Crabbe's own. He could not always draw his own curtains so firmly against the moonshine's lure. At sixty he was to woo a girl. In consequence, his view of life, despite his stoicism and his humour, remains intensely sad.

Ah, world unknown! How charming is thy view;  
Thy pleasures many, and each pleasure new!  
Ah, world experienc'd, what of thee is told?  
How few thy pleasures, and those few how old!

His landscape lies under a grey light, very different from the dappled sunshine in Miss Austen's morning-room. Perhaps women are less often pessimists—or passionate pessimists—than men. Madame Ackermanns are rare. Crabbe has his English faith in the ultimate goodness of God, as a sort of Universal Landlord, rather absentee, who can be trusted to behave like a decent Englishman when the final audit comes. But this life, meanwhile, is not gay to watch. It is not the high tragedies that are

hardest to bear: they come seldom, and he does not write of those. It is the long littleness of the common lot, the silent suffering, the growing weakness and squalor of the body, the progress of prose in the soul. 'Il y a horriblement de mal sur la terre'—the sense of that pressed harder on Crabbe than on Voltaire; but it also wrung from him some of his most real poetry. Set this picture of pauper graves beside Gray's *Country Churchyard*; it need not shrink from the comparison:

There lie the happy dead, from trouble free,  
And the glad parish pays the frugal fee.  
No more, O Death, thy victim starts to hear  
Churchwarden stern or kingly overseer;  
No more the farmer claims his humble bow;  
Thou art his lord, the best of tyrants thou.

But a closer and clearer parallel is, of course, with Gray's enemy, who encouraged Crabbe's beginnings, Samuel Johnson. Both men had the same uncanting sense of the world's real sorrows and the same impatience with the imaginary ones of hypochondriacs:

Who with mock patience dire complaints endure  
Which real pain, and that alone, can cure.

And how easily might lines like these come from *The Vanity of Human Wishes*!—

The rich man built a house both large and high;  
He enter'd in, and set him down to sigh;

or:

Of Hermit Quarll we read, in island rare,  
Far from mankind, and seeming far from care;

Safe from all want, and sound in every limb;  
Yes! there was he, and there was care with him;

or this picture of unrepentant age (though here, perhaps, the actual source is Dryden's *All for Love*):

Like a sad traveller who, at closing day,  
Finds he has wander'd widely from his way,  
Yet wanders on, nor will new paths explore,  
Till the night falls and he can walk no more.

But Crabbe, with the strain of romance in his nature, is also in time a generation nearer than Johnson to the Romantic Revival. He is less afraid of letting his imagination go. Like a plebeian cousin of Landor, he, too, stands at the meeting of two centuries, between reason and dream. Johnson would never have written *Sir Iustace Gray*, that opium-stimulated nightmare which, however inferior to *Kubla Khan*, is a strange work for this solid Anglican; even though in deference to good sense he puts it in the mouth of a haunted lunatic:<sup>1</sup>

They forced me on, where ever dwell  
Far-distant men in cities fair,  
Cities of whom no travellers tell,  
Nor feet but mine were wanderers there.

Their watchmen stare, and stand aghast,  
As on we hurry through the dark;  
The watch-light blinks as we go past,  
The watch-dog shrinks and fears to bark.

But even when Crabbe rides away over the hills of romance, his grim realism rides behind him; he takes the

<sup>1</sup> Scott applied a quotation from it to himself when his mind was beginning to fail.

road, not towards Xanadu, but towards Wuthering Heights. He never travels so far; but tales like '*Smugglers and Poachers*' or '*Peter Grimes*', with its description of the spectres that haunt the fisherman who has murdered his apprentices, show both sides of Crabbe. If his romanticism calls up the accusing phantoms, it is his minutest realism that paints the setting—the slimy channels in the salt-marsh, the blighted tree, the melancholy stakes with their sun-blistered tar, the tepid, muddy waters,

Where the small eels that left the deeper way  
For the warm shore, within the shallows play;  
Where gaping muscles, left upon the mud,  
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood.  
Here, dull and hopeless, he'd lie down and trace  
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race,  
Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry  
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;  
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,  
And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,  
Gave from the salt ditch side the bellowing boom:  
He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,  
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice,  
Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,  
Ran with a dull, unvaried, sadd'ning sound.

The last two lines might be a description of Crabbe's own verse; and certainly the 'muscles' are a little difficult to swallow; but then we are meant to see the scene, not to like it. Those who are amused by contrasts should turn to the picture of this same Dunwich coast in Swinburne's *By the North Sea*. Nothing could be more different; there, on the contrary, we are meant to admire rather than to see:

Miles and miles and miles of desolation!

Leagues on leagues on leagues without a change!

Sign or token of some eldest nation

Here would make the strange land not so strange.

Time-forgotten, yea since Time's creation.

Seem these borders where the sea-birds range.

Crabbe indulges in no such flourishes, he is down on his knees among the bugloss and sea-lavender; but his landscapes are, perhaps, the most permanent part of his work. Here, too, he stands between two ages: Pope would have thought him too mean, Johnson too minute and precise, while Wordsworth and Coleridge found him too unimaginative. And yet even his portraits of human character will perhaps be outlived by these still-lives and landscapes—such as that favourite of Tennyson's (whose *Enoch Arden* was indebted to Crabbe's *Parting Hour*):

But now dejected, languid, listless, low,  
He saw the wind upon the water blow,  
And the cold stream curl'd onward as the gale  
From the pinewood blew harshly down the dale . . .  
Far to the left he saw the huts of men  
Half hid in mist that hung upon the fen.  
Before him swallows, gathering for the sea,  
Took their short flights and twitter'd on the lea:  
And, near, the bean-sheaf stood, the harvest done,  
And slowly blacken'd in the sickly sun.

Or again:

Cold grew the foggy morn, the day was brief,  
Loose on the cherry hung the crimson leaf;



The dew dwelt ever on the herb; the woods  
Roar'd with strong blasts, with mighty showers the  
floods;

All green was vanish'd, save of pine and yew,  
That still display'd their melancholy hue;  
Save the green holly with its berries red,  
And the green moss that o'er the gravel spread.

Or, bleaker still:

And void of stars the angry clouds look down  
On the cold earth, exchanging frown with frown.

Yet more desolate, perhaps, than all his wintry landscapes is that still-life from a workhouse death-bed:

A yellow teapot, standing at his side,  
From its half-spout the cold black tea supplied.

It is ludicrous, and yet it is also grisly, that teapot; and its tea seems venomous.

Crabbe wrote far too much (*The Borough* alone contains ten thousand lines), and rewrote far too little; but he is in himself a typical representative—more typical than most of our poets—of that nation of shopkeepers which has yet produced the finest body of poetry in the world. The stiff Saxon clay, the saving spark of Franco-Norman wit, the moral grimness of Langland and the humorous insight of Chaucer—we may fancy we can trace that double ancestry in him, as in many another writer of our race. His thick-ankled style has none of the grace of the pure French artists he sometimes distantly recalls—such as Guy de Maupassant, or the Flaubert of

Madame Bovary, whose tragedy of thwarted romanticism would have at once appealed to Crabbe. Even Balzac is elegant beside this homespun Englishman. And yet Fitzgerald's beloved 'old Man' keeps still some of the grey power of the native countryside he fondly painted—the quiet murmur of its lowland rivers with their willows, like his couplets, two and two; the desolate appeal of its wind-warped pines and lonely-blooming furze; the silver light of sunset on its still estuaries. It changes little with the passing of the seasons and the years; it endures where beauties of a more artificial culture wither and vanish without a trace.

DAVID GARNETT

## A TERRIBLE DAY

This summer I was staying a few days in Kent with a friend of mine in his ugly little cottage, which is only a yard or two from the main road. Arnold had to be out all day and I wandered about, keeping out of his wife's way and feeling rather bored. I wished that I had not come to stay with them and that I could get away earlier than had been arranged, or that I had my car with me so that I could go out all day visiting other friends, for I have many in different parts of Kent, though none within easy walking distance of Tunbridge Wells.

If they had lived in a beautiful house I could have spent the day happily doing something useful, such as whitewashing a room or making a rockery in the garden. Unfortunately, it was no good doing anything like that, because the cottage was horrid and they were leaving it in the autumn.

Outside the sun blazed and dust rose up in clouds. The great fields had been swept bare by the haymakers; in the distance one could hear the clicking horse-rake gathering up the last wisps.

There is very little arable land in Kent, and there were scarcely any cornfields, but two or three hundred yards away there were a couple of big hop-gardens. Sometimes I went and walked in one of them under the complicated network of rough twine which bound the tops of the poles together and along which the hop-bines were just beginning to spread themselves. They were too thin as yet to give much shadow; it would be another month before the

hop-garden became a cool, green cavern, like a grotto under the sea. Yet I should have liked to have sat there and to have read a book, but, unfortunately, though the hops smelt nice themselves, so far as they smelt at all, there was some very potent chemical or fish manure that made it nasty to be there very long, so I could not sit and read and had to leave the hop-garden. I was rather annoyed also because I could not tell whether there was going to be a good or a bad crop, and I should have liked to have said, when I went back to London: 'I've just come back from staying in Kent: the hops are looking wonderful.' I like to know about the crops, and all I could say truthfully would be: 'The hops smell of disinfectant and rotten fish.'

When I lay down in one of the hayfields the sharp stubble of grass pricked me through my trousers and made a sort of rash on my hips and elbows. The book I was reading was unsuitable for reading out of doors and I should have preferred *The Times*, but Sybil spent most of the day reading *The Times* through from cover to cover.

But one cannot read all the time, and I was standing behind a low-cut hedge of hawthorn, which did not come much above my waist, watching a pair of goldfinches, birds which one does not see often though they are not really rare, when I saw a man walking towards me along the high road, which was thick with dust over the tar, the white dust of August which had powdered over all the leaves and a new layer of which settled down over everything within twenty yards of the road whenever a motor-car passed by. Along the dusty road came this big dusty man with a hot shining face, without a hat. He had his coat off, too, and when he came up to me I saw that he

was not carrying it. He was in his shirt-sleeves and his black waistcoat arched in a gentle curve over his prosperous belly, though the real bulk of the man was behind and lower down, where he filled out his black-and-grey striped trousers rather ridiculously.

He carried a carefully rolled umbrella in his hand. Perhaps I may have shown some amusement in my voice when I called out:

'A lovely day, Sir', for he looked distinctly comic. That, of course, was the reason for my speaking to him.

He glanced at me in surprise and came up to the edge of the road and stood still, opposite me but separated by the width of the grass bordering the road, before he answered.

'It has been the most terrible day of my life.' He mopped the dust and sweat off his forehead with his shirt-sleeve, while I looked at him and noticed that his black city clothes were good under their white powdering.

'Oh, I'm sorry to hear you say that.'

He looked at me suspiciously for a moment as though he had guessed that I had been amused by him, and when he spoke it was as though he were airing a grievance for which I might be partly to blame.

'Yes, I've had a most terrible experience.' I nodded gravely, pretending sympathy. 'I don't suppose you want to hear about it; but I'll tell you. I'd like to tell everybody.' His voice was bullying from long habit, but he was indignant and in earnest about something. I began to like him a little.

'I should put up your umbrella, if I were you,' I said. 'You might get sunstroke on such a hot day, and you've not got a hat.' I gave this advice in perfectly even tones, without a trace of mockery appearing in my voice, so that

it did not occur to him that I might be pulling his leg. I knew, of course, that it wasn't a very safe sort of suggestion to make, although quite a sensible one.

'I look odd enough as it is, thank you,' he replied, seeming rather scandalized. 'I know I'm not dressed for a walk in the country, but I don't want to appear more eccentric than I can help. You see, I don't often have to go into the country on business. I'm a sales-manager, not a commercial traveller. But I had to come down to-day in rather a hurry about an important contract of ours in Tunbridge Wells. That's why I took the slow train, I couldn't wait for the express. When I arrived I went at once to the lavatory to have a good wash and brush up. All those tunnels on the Southern Railway make the old carriages very dirty. I put down my bag, took off my coat, hung up my hat, and put my face in a basin of hot water and had a really refreshing wash. While I was doing that the attendant went out and someone walked off with my hat and coat and my bag. I called the attendant and asked him if he'd moved my things; then I ran out into the street, but, of course, I couldn't see anyone. The thief had had time to clear out.

'Well, the worst of it was that my wallet was in my coat pocket with all my money. I had given the lavatory man the last of my change. What was I to do? What would you have done, eh?'

He paused to look at me. While he had been speaking an odd smile had come on to my face against my will: the sympathy which I had flung him like a rope, and which he had grasped so eagerly when he began his story, was hanging slackly between us. I still held the end of that rope feebly in my hand. Hundreds of beggars pass along that high road every day, and I never give money away



to beggars. If this man asked for a loan I should just drop my bond of sympathy, shake my head and turn away. He was a beggar, a confidence trickster who had hit on a new and ingenious idea: a very plausible sort of yarn. Now he was watching me to see how I had taken it. Our eyes met, and suddenly he went on:

‘I went to the police, of course, and gave them a full description of my property, but like a damned fool I did not think of borrowing money until I had parted from the inspector and come out into the street. Then, for some reason, I hated to go back. I don’t think I’ve ever asked a stranger to lend me anything in the whole of my life. What was I to do?’ I smiled ironically, and he went on:

‘The contract and specifications were all in my bag. I couldn’t march into our clients’ office and ask to see the managing director in my shirt-sleeves. I had never met him and it would have been a very bad introduction. We should lose the contract; we should deserve to at all events. I hadn’t a card or a single thing to prove my identity; I hadn’t a sixpence in my pocket, and, of course, I looked very queer standing like that in the street. By a most extraordinary piece of bad luck, would you believe it? (“Now he’s lying”, flashed through my mind as he said this) I had left my gold watch and chain, which I have worn every day for twenty years, at Dent’s the watch-makers in Trafalgar Square, to be cleaned and overhauled. It is the first time I’ve ever had anything done to that watch since I’ve had it. Moreover, it was not having my watch which led me to catch the slow train: if I had caught the express there would have been a lavatory in the Pullman coach, and none of this would ever have happened. One misfortune follows another.’

‘So I suppose you are walking back to London because

you haven't got the fare,' I said, in a rather malicious kind of way.

'Walking back to London? Good God, man, it must be thirty miles! No fear. No, I remembered a jolly old chap whom I knew in Tonbridge, a man with whom I had done business often, and I thought the best thing I could do was to walk over and borrow some money from him.'

'You've only three miles farther to go, in that case,' I said spitefully. 'It won't seem such a very terrible experience when you've got there.'

He laughed. 'Oh, that's nothing. I've not got to what I was speaking about when I said this was the most terrible day of my life. Anybody may have his coat and his bag stolen and have to walk a few miles because he's too much of a fathead to borrow money from people he doesn't know. I'm not complaining of that: it's all in the game. What's happened to me is something far, far worse.'

I smiled again rather uncomfortably. 'What's he going to tell me now,' I wondered. 'He saw that he hadn't got my sympathy and so he's going to branch out on a new line of country.' A new feeling of respect for the subtlety and resourcefulness of this artful dodger came over me, mingled with the embarrassment one always feels when anyone is telling lies one doesn't believe. I was almost on the point of saying to him: 'Here's half a crown: now get along and save your breath to cool your porridge.' I should indeed have spoken and conceivably have given him some money, except that I was maliciously interested in observing how long it would take before he gave me up as a hopeless person from whom to try to borrow. I don't know why I was malicious, except that I didn't like the personality of the man—or rather the personality

he had adopted. He was so bulky and hot and overbearing and his tone was very slightly patronising, in spite of his agitation. He was quite insufferable: a pompous bullying bore who was suffering from some sort of nervous shock. It was really an extraordinary piece of impersonation.

‘About a mile and a half back along this road I was feeling terribly hot and thirsty and I was cursing myself for not having turned back into the police station when I saw a young chap standing just on the other side of the hedge with a bottle of Worthington in his hand, pouring out a glass of it. Over in the field where he was I could see the top of one of those little lightweight tents.

“‘Have a drink?’ he called out, and you can guess that I didn’t say ‘I prefer a Bass’ or anything of that sort. I’ve never begged a favour in my life, but when I meet a glass of ale in the middle of a long dusty road I don’t take it amiss. When I stood close by the hedge I could see two girls lying on a rug and another young chap cooking on one of those little Primus stoves. I stayed a minute or two sipping the beer slowly and talking. You see I had quite got over my irritation by then at having my things stolen, and I didn’t feel a bit put out or flustered at being like that in my shirt-sleeves. Well, we talked a bit about the tent: they had made themselves awfully cosy in there. Then one thing led to another and finally the fellow who was cooking looked up and asked me to have lunch with them. I was feeling very peckish, so I accepted. I wish I hadn’t now.

‘It was fine to sit down on the grass with those young people and eat a steak with fried onions off a paper plate and put down another bottle of Worthington. I never felt in better spirits in my life, or on better terms with the

world. I never gave a thought to the blessed contract that I was missing, or might be missing. One of the girls was so pretty that I couldn't stop looking at her: fair, blue eyes, a skin like the kernel of a nut with little blue veins running down her wrists and showing on her throat; a five-figure salary waiting for her at Hollywood, and I shouldn't think she was turned twenty. Neither of the girls took much notice of me: they talked to each other and the young fellows talked to me. But I kept on looking at that girl; the other one was nothing much: brown hair, freckles and horn spectacles, with bare legs and ugly kind of knees. Neither of the girls was much older than my own daughter. They looked awfully nice there in the shade of a big oak tree, there was a damned pigeon cooing, and everything was as serene and peaceful as a book.

'A funny thing was that I didn't tell any of them about having my coat stolen, or where I was walking to, or why. Everything seemed so pleasant and natural, and for some reason I started telling them about Brittany and St. Servan, where we had been last year for our summer holiday, and about the omelette they gave us at the Mont St. Michel. Just when I was getting to the description of the treadmill that Napoleon made the English tourists work in, I suddenly overheard what the girl was saying, I mean the good-looking one, what she was saying to the other one. I shall never be able to forget hearing a decent girl saying such a thing. She said (mind you, I'm not making this up): "Don't be such a fool, Molly. Of course I want a baby, but I have very strong feelings about picking the father. He must have a wonderful voice and that means, nowadays, finding a negro."

'The girl called Molly laughed at that as though it were a good joke, but it left me feeling hot all over. For the

first moment I thought I must have heard it wrong, and I listened without saying a word, though I was just in the middle of my story about Napoleon's treadmill and the tourists, just at the bit where I said to the guide: "You just try that on some of us to-day, will you!" But I couldn't go on with my story. Only the damned pigeon kept up a coo-boo, coo-boo. It didn't know any better. But everything was spoiled for me. Well, to go back to where we were.

"You had better find out how the voice is inherited, Fanny. If it is inherited at all," said Molly. That showed she was just as bad as the pretty one herself, didn't it?"

I smiled at this remark. The big fat man seemed to me curiously pathetic, and I wondered whether I was ever upset by things as irrelevant as this silly remark which had disturbed him so profoundly. I looked at him with mingled pity and contempt, and saw that he was deep in thought and that the unaccustomed exercise had wrinkled his forehead up in pain. He had no attention to spare for me.

'You know, if I believed those girls were thorough wrong 'uns, I should feel much happier. If I knew that they were thoroughly vicious, perverted and all that sort of thing.' This annoyed me violently, and I snapped out: 'Of course you would. But why don't you if it would make you more comfortable?' He shook his head.

'Of course, I know they were sleeping out in a field with a couple of young fellows, and I dare say you would say that that settled it. But I've always prided myself on being open-minded. I'm not a back number, you know. I despise all that tommy-rot about short skirts and mixed bathing. I like 'em myself and why not? I don't care how much a girl shows of herself, and I've always thought the

present generation a damned sight more sensible than our mothers and grandmothers were, and a damned sight luckier, too. What if two girls do sleep out with a couple of young men? I've read H. G. Wells, and there's a lot to be said for freedom, even for sexual freedom within limits and as long as it's clean and healthy. Mind you, I've got daughters of my own, but I look at it like this: my girls will want to marry, won't they? No one wants old maids for the sake of purity. Well, I would rather my girls went about on the backs of motor-cycles and shared in everything with decent boys, and then fell in love once or twice and then got married when it suited them. They'll know the men they're marrying like that, and the boys don't go off with tarts. I've always looked at it like that and been broad-minded, ready for a bit of fun myself and ready to trust everyone. And now to-day I hear a decent girl saying openly that she is wanting a nigger!

I was, of course, amused by all this, but at the same time I was really rather bored, because I had lost sympathy with him, and I can never find an unsympathetic character entertaining, however ridiculous he may be. I am ready to laugh at the absurdity of a man, but it's always a defensive laugh, because I dislike having to admit the existence of anyone whose ideas I hate. I had begun to hate this man already.

'Well,' I said, 'is that all?'

'No, that's not half the story. "Be sure you find out how the negro voice is inherited, Fanny," said the other girl, who was called Molly. "Oh, that's all right," said Fanny. "The trouble is that I don't know any negroes, and, of course, I want an educated man, as intelligent as possible, and I don't know where to look for him."



"Advertise in the *Field*," said the young fellow who had been frying the steak. That was one up to him, wasn't it? But it made the girl mad and she hit him.

"Shut up, Frank! Don't you see I'm serious? I suppose I shall have to go to America to find a negro. I don't want a dancer or a man doing turns in a music hall. I want an intelligent cultivated man with a fine voice."

"A negro bishop," said Frank.

"That is one of the difficulties," she said, and laughed. "Most negroes are so terribly religious. When I find a suitable man he'll probably give me a fearful blowing up and tell me I have been sent to him by Satan."

'They all laughed at that. I'm not what you call a religious man——'

But at this I was frankly bored and aware that I was bored, so I hastily interrupted him with a question which had occurred to me as one which might give him pain.

'You had finished up the steak and beer they had given you by that time, I suppose?'

He didn't like it at all. 'I couldn't tell, could I, when I sat down with them? But it was rather awkward, you know, getting up and telling them all off when I had just been eating their food. Still, I couldn't sit there silent and let them think I approved, could I?'

The beastly man seemed to be getting worse and worse, and I despaired of getting rid of him.

'How did they take your outburst?' I asked.

'Outburst?' he asked, in a rather puzzled tone of voice. It was obvious that it had not yet occurred to him that I thought him obnoxious.

'Well, your denunciation or whatever it was.'

'I was coming to that when you interrupted me. The pretty girl, Fanny, had just said: "Another difficulty is

that they lynch negroes for that in America, don't they? So even if I found a man who was sufficiently free from religious prejudices to consent to beget a child with me I might not find any man brave enough to take the risk."

"They all laughed at this more than at anything that she had said, but I stood up and said as quietly as I could: "I hope they lynch you too, Miss. I'm an open-minded man, but I've never heard anything so disgusting as your conversation in my life. I've never before heard of an English girl who was looking about for a nigger to marry."

"While I was speaking they all sat perfectly quiet: it had taken them by surprise, but after a moment she said, very quietly:

"But I don't want to marry a negro. I would much prefer to have an Englishman for my husband or for my lover. I only want a negro to be the father of my children. You see, it's not at all the same thing. I don't want a negro for his own sake, but only because I want my children to be little darkies. There would be no dentists' bills, and they would have such high spirits and be musical."

"I waited till she had finished, then I said straight out: "That is immoral and disgraceful, and it disgusts me! Talk like that is unworthy of an Englishwoman."

"Oh, chuck it," said the man they called Frank.

"You're quite entitled to call Fanny immoral and disgusting," said the other girl, "but I wish you would explain why you mind so much what she does. Why should you object to other peoples' habits? You don't know her or me. Why shouldn't we be free to live as we like until it is proved that we do other people harm?"

"For the first minute I thought I wouldn't take any notice of that, but then I said to her what I think is the truth: "I'm a broad-minded Englishman. I believe in

liberty. But, if you are English, you know that you have a duty. Your duty is to play the game. You must think of the race."

"*Noblesse oblige*," said the girl. "We must sacrifice the musical talents of unborn generations for fear that Englishmen should become rather blacker and woolly-headed in another five hundred years' time."

"I ignored this remark, for I saw that she was only trying to irritate me, so I turned instead to the pretty girl, Fanny, and said: "If you are English, don't you feel it is up to you to—to be white? To live up to the traditions, to the examples——?"

"Rather pathetic and rather sweet," said Frank.

"Yes, I am English," Fanny answered me. "But would you feel quite so strongly if I were a negress saying that I should like an Englishman to be the father of my children?"

"When she asked me that it stopped me from being angry. It was such an innocent sort of thing to say and showed that she didn't know what she was talking about.

"That wouldn't be the same. You seem to have forgotten what the poet says: 'We needs must love the highest when we see it'."

"They all laughed when I said that.

"Are you speaking personally?" she asked. "Are you suggesting that I ought to choose you?"

"I was too angry to mind what I said.

"Better any white man, even if he's far worse than me. A respectable decent Englishman wouldn't go near you, but better any out-of-work tramp walking the roads——"

"You see, I had forgotten how I looked to them.

"Hold on," said the young fellow called George. "If you go on talking to Fanny like that you will rouse the

sleeping bulldog in us, and Frank and I will chuck you into a horse-pond. But that's not what I want to say. I want to ask you: who are you to be so damned respectable? How do you come to be tramping the roads, without a coat on your back, preaching conventional morality?"

"Of course, that took me aback a bit. I could see that I was in a false position, and I thought I had better tell them my story from the beginning. They were all interested. I could see that though they laughed a bit. I didn't mind that because I can always see a joke even if it's at my own expense. And I didn't mind what he said about throwing me into a horse-pond. I had gone much too far. It was the best thing any of them had said, as a matter of fact. But the next thing he said surprised me.

"I suppose you'd like to borrow some money?" he asked.

"Not from someone who threatens me with a horse-pond because I said what I felt it was my duty to say." They laughed again at that.

"Of course we shall lend you some money," said the pretty girl, Fanny. "What a lucky thing it is that you should have met us."

"Lucky for both of you," said George, sneering, as much at her as at me. "If he hadn't come by you might never have been told the truth about yourself: that no decent man would ever have anything to do with you, and you, Sir, mightn't have found anyone in Tonbridge to lend you five pounds."

"And he pulled out his pocket-book and picked out a fiver."

"Did he? By Jove," I said. "But I suppose you were too proud to take it. You would like me to lend you one instead?"

The big man flushed an even darker red. 'Well, as a matter of fact, I did accept the loan. I know I oughtn't to have done.' And, to my astonishment, he produced a carefully folded five-pound note from his waistcoat pocket. I had so completely accepted my theory that he was a confidence trickster of some sort that I was absolutely flabbergasted at the sight and could not think of anything to say.

'At first I refused to borrow anything, but the pretty girl said: "Your old friend may be away on a holiday or anything, and you had much better take the money." That seemed sensible, but I didn't like taking it from young George, because of the way he had been sneering. I don't think he believed my story, yet if he didn't I can't make out why he offered me the money. At last I said: "I shouldn't mind so much if I could write you a cheque for it, but, of course, I've lost my cheque-book with all my other things."

"If you insist on writing a cheque," said the one called Frank, "there's no difficulty about it. You can write it on one of mine. Just cross out the address of my bank and fill in the name of yours and they will cash it all right. I've often done it."

'So that's what I did. When I said good-bye they all stood up and waved. "I won't shake hands, because no respectable man would care to touch me," said Fanny.

'I couldn't say anything or do anything. I had eaten their food, taken their money and insulted the girl, though I had meant it for the best. I was right and all of them were wickedly wrong, but I couldn't say anything more. Directly I had turned my back I heard them all laughing. I walked away saying to myself: "This has been the most terrible day of my life."

'A little laughter isn't so terrible,' I said, for the big man was showing symptoms of tears. Yes, his eyes were swimming and he was rubbing them.

'But it is terrible,' he said. 'A girl like that: a pure English girl of twenty growing up corrupted like that. That young man doesn't value money; he didn't believe my story and gave me five pounds because he didn't care whether he got paid back or not. I have been working all my life; I've just been keen on the job, but I've always known I was building something up; I've worked for myself, but it's men like me that have made the world what it is. That's progress. But these young people have been growing up behind our backs and they don't value anything. There's nothing sacred: they talk about anything and they will do anything. All our work's gone for nothing.'

'The worst thing of all, though, is that girl: I would do anything to save her. If I could only have made her see how wicked it was to talk or think or speak like that. Think of that girl Fanny. Then think of my own girls. I feel I ought to go back and try to do something. But she only thinks I'm shocked. She doesn't see that it's more than that. I'm thinking about her.'

'You are shocked and that's all about it. I quite see that it's been a terrible day for you, but I daresay she will never find the perfect negro.'

'That doesn't make any difference. It only makes it seem better. I have been trying to console myself like that but it's the attitude. It has been terrible—terrible.'

He was frankly blubbering now. It was hideously embarrassing. A tear ran down each of his objectionable scarlet cheeks.

'My dear chap, if there's anything I can do——'



He made an effort and pulled himself together. 'Do? No, what can any of us do?' Suddenly he remembered something else.

'I suppose you couldn't possibly change this note for me? I'm hoping to stop a bus and it's rather large to offer the conductor.' Almost without thinking I pulled out my pocket-book. Yes, I had five pounds and handed them to him without hesitation.

'Thank you.' Soon he was a figure hurrying away from me along the hot, dusty main road, and only when he had disappeared did it dawn on me that he must have given me a forged note. I looked at it, held it to the light, crunched up the crackling new paper, but could make nothing of it. The glaring light of the sun dazzled and blinded me, and after I had held the note up against the sky to look at the watermark, everything went black before my eyes. On all sides I could hear the grasshoppers stridulating in the stubbles of the hayfield, and to my ears it seemed at first that they mimicked the crackle of the forged note, and then, as I walked back angrily to the cottage, their song changed.

Tricked . . . tricked . . . tricked . . .  
tricked . . . tricked . . .

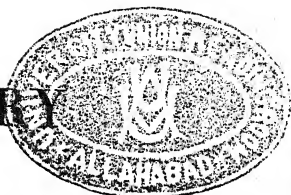
That was their refrain.

Next morning I hurried off to the bank in Tonbridge and showed my five-pound note to the clerk behind the grill. He took it away with him and I could see him scrutinizing it with the manager. But I ought to have known the truth before he came back to me gravely with it in his hand. I ought to have known without asking.

'That's quite all right,' he said. 'That's a perfectly genuine Bank of England note.'

G. M. YOUNG

## VICTORIAN HISTORY



The word Victorian was coined in the year 1860 by one Harris, an architect specializing in shop-fronts, to commend a trade publication on street architecture. The first occurrence I have noticed in literature is in an essay by the Chaucerian scholar Furnivall, in 1873: 'When has the world matcht ours in this Victorian age?' By the nineties, early Victorian had acquired something of that contemptuous under-meaning which Elizabethan had for Dryden: 'the old Elizabeth way for maids to be seen and not heard'. The long reign of the Sovereign, the long careers of her most illustrious contemporaries, created an illusion under which our generation still lies. If it had been the Queen and not Prince Albert who died in 1861, the process of English history would have been less easy to misconceive. No one would ever have thought of giving one name to the decades dominated by Bentham and the Evangelicals, and the decades dominated by Darwin and the Agnostics. In 1850 we are in the past. In 1870 we are in a world continuous with our own. Between them lies the Victorian Revolution, the insular parallel to a turn in the European mind as decisive as the turn from the Middle Ages in the Cinquecento. Everything before led up to it: everything since has followed from it; and it coincided with the great expansion of the English people. This gives to the mid-Victorian age the ecumenical significance which it shares with Alexandrian Greece and Renaissance Italy. Whatever the future may have in store for us, nothing can alter the fact that for

centuries, perhaps for ages, great nations in all continents, if they are sufficiently civilized to be interested in the origins of their culture, laws, institutions, and ideas, will look for them in the historians of Victorian England.

The problem of the historian here is not discovery but interpretation. The facts are accessible and illimitable. There are no secrets, or none worth knowing. But with all respect to the distinguished scholars who preside over our history schools, I doubt whether the historians whom we need will be produced by the modern discipline in Research.

Light dies before that uncreating word!

History, at Seeley's command, withdrew from contact with the world of letters, manners, and ideas: in retreat, it has acquired some of the frowsiness of the eremite, and poor Clio has been reduced to keeping house for Harlequin and Pantaloon. If the values of the popular school are wrong, as they obviously are, the values of the researcher are not necessarily right. I cannot help thinking that, as a training for an historian of modern times, a year spent in studying the methods of the great masters would be worth five years spent in the Record Office or at that inauspicious shrine of the severer Muses, Old Canterbury Gaol. History, after all, to an educated man, is the kind of thing that Herodotus and Gibbon and those people used to write. It is the kind of thing that in our time Maitland could write. These are high standards to set. But Professor Trevelyan survives to show they are not inaccessible. Otherwise, when I find critical journals of repute talking of the vast erudition shown in *The Victorian Tragedy*, its brilliancy, its weight, and the new era it has opened in Victorian studies, I should be tempted to

wonder whether in history we had any standards left at all.

Dr. Wingfield Stratford is the author of a *History of British Civilization*, which has been truly, and, I think, adequately, characterized as gigantic. In *The Victorian Tragedy* (Routledge. 12s. 6d.), he sets out to expound the essential verities of four decades in three hundred pages. He professes an impartial contempt for political, military, and ecclesiastical history, for most of the characters who cross his pages, and for such of his predecessors as he has read. The high praise with which his book has been received in quarters to which, as a Common Reader, I look for guidance led me to take it up with hopeful anticipation. But it soon became clear that what really interested Dr. Stratford was not the behaviour of the animals but the postures of the showman, and though I have read *The Victorian Tragedy* with attention three times through, I have got little from it beyond an occasional glimpse of moonshine through a flying rack of fustian.

The style is a compost of the sort of declamation which our ancestors called rant, and the sort of irony which they called Sadler's Wells sarcasm. The personages are always speaking at the top of their voices in 'furious howls' or 'bellowing indignation'. Superlatives explode under our feet. The publications of the Parker Society—which include among other things the sermons of Latimer and the correspondence of Matthew Parker—do not interest the historian of British Civilization. So they become 'the dingiest and stodgiest collection of printed matter on human record'. The new workhouses were doubtless often very horrible places, but scarcely 'hells more squalid and unrelieved than anything imagined by Dante. . . . It was better to be dead than a pauper'. Dr. Stratford does not

mean that it was better to be dead than a pauper. He is only talking. Of anything written in this style, it is better not to examine the meaning too closely, or one might find oneself asking why only 'arduous bibliophiles' can read Spencer Walpole's *History*, or what chain of ideas has led Dr. Stratford to the conclusion on page 58 that Jesu is the feminine of Jesus.

Dr. Stratford is one of those historians who save themselves trouble by assuming that the Victorians all lived at the same time and behaved with the disciplined unanimity of the Jesuits or the OGPU. For a writer of scientific antecedents he shows a really astonishing inability to distinguish between a general and a particular proposition. The reader never knows whether for Victorians he should read all Victorians or some Victorians, Victorians like everyone else or Victorians as opposed to the rest of mankind. One crass generalization follows another till the tub gapes under the thumping. That the ideas of 1865 might be different from those of 1850, and profoundly different from those of 1835, hardly seems to have occurred to him. In fact, ideas interest him very little. On the other hand, I have never read an author who is so class-conscious. He can spot a bourgeois ten miles off. He nowhere defines a bourgeois, but his idea of one can be elicited from pages 126 to 128, where it will be found to include Napoleon, Samuel Smiles, Sainte Beuve, and Matthew Arnold, and to exclude Dr. Stratford and Christ.

The truth is that Dr. Stratford has neither read enough nor thought enough to write on a period so full and intricate as the Victorian Age, and, as Johnson said, when the matter is insignificant 'its bulk is to be enlarged with rage and exclamation'. His picture of English society in 1830, for example, which reminds the *London Mercury* of

Macaulay's third chapter, could hardly be cruder if we were at war with England in 1830 and Dr. Stratford was writing for the Ministry of Propaganda. Even more remarkable than an analysis which assumes that the upper classes were all Tories, and the middle classes all engaged in cut-throat competition, and forgets that a large number of both were educated men, is his conviction that 'the Victorians' were quite unaware of the significance and possible consequence of the growth of population. It is on this *idée fixe* that he relies to justify the title of his book, and the matter is of so much consequence to a proper understanding of Victorian civilization that I think he should be heard at length.

The historian of a future age who can see to the close of the story may perhaps decide that the production of men was even more revolutionary in its effects than that of things and that the vital statistics were not those of imports and exports but of a population mounting every year above the possibility of maintenance except from overseas. The output of the factories was in the long run less important than that of the double bed. . . .

And so on and so on, about refined propagation, the Unmentionable, virginal bosoms, Flora and Reginald, and whether the Brownings ever saw one another naked,<sup>1</sup> topics which Dr. Stratford's style is well fitted to adorn. But really the Victorians did not need a future historian to tell them that two babies eat more than one. Anyone who is at all familiar with the political writers of the early Victorian age knows that the population question was

<sup>1</sup> 'And thus they form a group that's quite antique  
Half-naked, loving, natural, and Greek.'

Were Juan and Haidee Victorians? Or only half-Victorians?



never out of their minds,' and never for long out of their mouths. Malthus had raised a spectre which could be neither laid nor ignored. In fact, the sentence I have quoted only reproduces what Disraeli said more impressively in *Sybil*, a book which, as Dr. Stratford would say, even Dr. Stratford seems to have read.

Dr. Stratford recurs to his point with portentous iteration:

Unlike any other nation England had multiplied her population out of all proportion to her capacity for feeding it. More than half of the human beings crowded within her shores could not by the utmost conceivable straining of her resources keep soul and body together unless by a never-ending stream of imports from overseas. Once let her fail to maintain her position in the world's market, and death, in its most appalling shape, would bring down her population with mathematical certainty million by million to what it had been before the days of the railroad and the power-loom. That central problem was the theme of the Victorian Tragedy.

A less turbid writer might have reflected that even if all foreign imports failed the improvements in agricultural science would enable England to support a population much larger than it was before the days of the packhorse and the handloom. But let that pass.

That millions and millions of people should die in the most appalling way would, no doubt, be tragic. But they did not. They multiplied, lived and thrived. Even to-day they are, if not exactly multiplying, living and thriving in a way which in 1831 'it would have been hardly sane' to prophesy. It is almost a grievance with Dr. Stratford that

they refused to die, million by million, in the most appalling ways. They were, *quod minime reris*, saved by their own shortcomings.

It was part of the peculiar Victorian sense of decency to avoid going to the root of things. And the Victorians were not only decent but eminently practical folks, which meant that when they were faced with any practical difficulty they went straight for a practical remedy.

Even a neo-Georgian must acknowledge that when the practical difficulty takes the shape of imminent famine, the practical remedy of feeding the brutes goes as near the root of things as human nature can get.

But there was another way in which the matter might have been regarded had there been anyone capable of probing the matter to its depths. What the Industrial Revolution had done for England was to commit her to a huge gamble. To an increasing extent she had to rely on the foreigner

and so forth, *da capo*. It is not surprising that no Victorian ever formulated this reflection, for, as a matter of fact, it is nonsense. The increase of population made England dependent on foreign foodstuffs. The progress of industry enabled her to buy them. Dr. Stratford concludes that it was industry that made her dependent on the foreigner, a palpable confusion of ideas. This confusion is the theme of *The Victorian Tragedy*.

Sometimes the Tragedy is relieved by a little roguishness:

True to their instinct of concentrating on immediate

necessities and ignoring the deeper issues, the Victorians were careful to invest the marriage chamber with a taboo of absolute secrecy. Gone was the time when the bridal bed had been covered with flowers.

We glean the same impression from conventional Victorian history as from all but the best Victorian fiction—namely, that the most important part of the story is that which a decent reticence forbids. For indeed the most important thing of all was the least mentionable, for it consisted in the increase of the population beyond any means of subsistence that these islands were capable of furnishing. And the ways and means of such increase were taboo.

Perhaps that is enough. It will be noticed that Dr. Stratford is inclined to repeat himself.

It is impossible to understand the early- and mid-Victorian ages unless we apprehend as clearly as thoughtful Victorians apprehended the magnitude, and the precise nature, of the danger to which the increase both of population and of the National Debt had exposed them. The Victorian intelligentsia was in many ways a clearer-headed race than its representative to-day, trained by the classical economists and the utilitarians in habits of exact reasoning, and furnished by the new science of statistics with an instrument for exploring the future. In 1830 Nassau Senior, writing on the population question, pointed out that as there was room for some hundreds of millions of white inhabitants in the Empire, the policy of birth-control, then being actively canvassed, was unnecessary, and that, if the influx of cheap Irish labour could be stopped and the emigration of surplus English labour stimulated, population could safely be

left for the resources of a future age to deal with. In 1837 Viscount Sandon, at a meeting of the British Association, warned his Lancashire hearers that the slavery question in North America could only have one outcome, a civil war of North and South, which would cut off the supply of raw cotton. He advised them to be in time and develop other sources from which to furnish their mills. These must be among the most successful forecasts on record. But they are characteristic: it cannot be said that the early Victorians faced the future with their eyes shut. And the future at times seemed very dark. To reverse the processes, social and scientific, which by lengthening and saving life had led to a gigantic increase in population, was out of the question. Like the Debt, the population was there: physically more vigorous than it had ever been, but uneducated, unpoliced, congregated in formidable masses within striking distance of the machinery in which the capital of the country was invested. Dr. Stratford twice speaks as if the working classes were only held down by Wellington's veterans. But every instinct, every tradition, forbade the authorities to use armed force until the crisis was on them: Bristol was fired while the soldiers were hesitating. After Waterloo, the army had been reduced below the limits of Imperial safety; it reached its minimum in 1819, when even Radicals afterwards admitted civil war to have been very near. At the beginning of the Victorian age, out of eighty-three regiments of the line, only nine, I think, were in England, and towards the forties, when there was some actual fighting, Peninsular veterans must have been beginning to feel twinges of old age. Painfully, and with many setbacks, the country had climbed out of the trough of depression after the war, only to be thrown back, it seemed, into the depths in

1825. The apparatus of credit was ramshackle, and, if it stopped, there were no foreign lenders to put England on her feet again. Already economists were beginning to calculate how long the shipping of the world would suffice to bring food to the crowded islanders. The excitement over the Reform Bills distracted attention from graver trouble: the new Parliament met in the tranquillity of a spent hurricane; and the golden harvest of 1835 sent a flush of delusive prosperity through the towns. Then, gradually and fatally, the darkness gathered again, growing deeper towards those years which have left so black a memory in our history, when people stood silent in the streets of London to watch the guns going north to Lancashire. The period from 1815 to 1845 has the unity and intensity of a great drama. It is hidden from us by the splendour of mid-Victorian prosperity, and we read as an exercise in fugal prose: 'three thrones of mark beyond all others—a prouder eminence, a less pitied destruction', what had once been a sober estimate of approaching doom. No one can determine the danger of a revolution which never happened: but the danger was there, the consequences, judged even by Russian standards, would have been indeed appalling. Civilization might have been destroyed—the phrase is Macaulay's—by the barbarism it had engendered. Only time could name the victor, and no one knew on which side time was fighting.

It was in those perilous years that the Victorian discipline was consolidated, as the war-morality of a beleaguered class. The rise of the religious temperature in the latter part of the eighteenth century is ultimately as inexplicable as the Romantic Revival. But the secondary causes, as Gibbon would have called them, of the progress and diffusion of the Evangelical faith are not difficult to

make out. Chief among them, as Dr. Stratford justly observes, was its alliance with the rising power in the State and the singular aptness, long ago indicated by Hannah More, of the Evangelical code to the requirements of a mercantile society. To be serious, to abstain, to redeem the time, to drive oneself harder than the natural man wants to go, to enjoy gains with moderation and sustain losses with equanimity, to be within reason generous and within reason honest, were virtues for which the reward was not laid up in Heaven only. By the beginning of the nineteenth century piety was advancing on a broad front. The French Revolution gave it impetus. Wilberforce's *Practical View* appeared, with a success which put poets and novelists in the shade, in the year of dismay when the French were on the sea and London saw itself blockaded by a fleet flying the Red Flag. If Wilberforce had been a yeoman like Cobbett, if Miss More had been born in the lower instead of the upper-middle class, or if Wesley before them had been a Bunyan or a Friar Ball, English history might have taken another turn. Being persons of breeding and culture they made the movements they led subserve the cause of order. The most fascinating man in England, listening in lace and diamonds to the nightingales of Kensington Gore, murmuring his thanks that he was born an Englishman and a gentleman, made the religion of the humble acceptable to the great. The followers of Wesley kept the proletariat steady. 'Wesleyanism,' said the ablest of them, 'is as much opposed to Democracy as it is to Sin.' Hannah More counts twice in the reckoning: always a good and at her best a brilliant writer, she addressed herself with equal effect to high and low, indeed, to black and white. A Jamaica negro, indicted for larceny, opened his defence



with the words: 'I puffick Christian, Sar; I lib like Shepherd on Salisbury Plain.' In 1827, Wilson of Calcutta, introducing the *Practical View* to a new generation, put it on record that Wilberforce had won: the Church and the Universities, the upper and middle classes, had become, or were fast becoming, all that the Evangelicals could desire. About the same time Scott marked out Thomas Acland, a Conservative squire, as leader of the 'religious party' in the House of Commons. How strong it was appears from the division on Sir Andrew Agnew's Sunday Bill a few years later, when one hundred and twenty-five members voted for the most rigorous piece of moral legislation that had been laid before Parliament since the Commonwealth. A story which the first Lord Hatherton used to tell his guests marks the peak: in 1812 only two gentlemen in Staffordshire read family prayers: in 1850 only two did not.

But success vulgarized the Evangelical code, as success had paganized its parent faith before. Unlike its foreign counterpart, the English bourgeoisie had never been isolated long enough to create, except in the sphere of carnal morality, ideals and standards of its own. It was mobile and not static; it tended to become a society, as every page of Victorian satire tells us, of aspirants and imitators. In this atmosphere moral and social values were silently interchanged: the austere outlines of the faith were blurred, grace and corruption insensibly merged in the respectable and the low. Social prescriptions were given a religious sanction; theological error incurred social retribution. Milman was ostracized for calling Abraham a sheikh; Mary Mitford was publicly reproved for calling a pudding a rolypoly. What penalties

were in reserve for greater sinners, Byron's ghost could tell.

*Admonet et magna testatur voce per umbras.*

I have called the Victorian discipline a war-morality. I do not, of course, suggest this as the complete explanation of a very subtle and various process. But Clough's phrase, 'an almost animal sensibility of conscience', goes deep, and something like this, some self-protective response to danger, is required to account for the severity with which it was imposed upon, the docility with which it was accepted by, classes who rejected its religious basis, who were not interested in its economic advantages, and who were famous all the world over for independence and even eccentricity. It is a pity that Coleridge's useful word 'Clerisy' never naturalized itself as a name for what we must call, more cumbrously and less adequately, the educated classes or the intelligentsia. What we see in the early-Victorian age is an alliance of the bourgeoisie and the clerisy for the maintenance of order, material order in the last resort, but moral order, orthodoxy of demeanour and of economic and religious thought as its spiritual basis. The bourgeoisie supplied the works and the clerisy the faith. There is a story in one of the early Education Reports which shows how the combination worked. A mob of unemployed attacked the house of a manufacturer at night. He met them, not with blunderbusses or professions of good-will, but with a lecture on economics. Raw material, so much; transport, so much; coal, so much; market price, so much. They shouted: 'You are right, sir', and went off. Where they differed—and there was a strong vein of eighteenth-century rationalism in the educated classes—the clerisy, on the whole, maintained a

loyal silence. Until peace was assured there was no place for critics or defaulters in the ranks.

Suddenly, as it seems to us in retrospect, and even in reality with a surprising swiftness, the siege was raised. To go from 1840 to 1850 is to enter another world. It is still possible to recapture in old newspapers some of the exultations of 1848 when the storm which uprooted half the governments of Europe passed harmlessly over the Islands, and the Revolution was shown out in pouring rain and a fourwheeler, or the passion of reconciliation and goodwill which swept the country in 1851. 'If you come through without a revolution you will give yourself more airs than ever', so the Princess Lieven, a woman of experience, told an English friend. 'Revolution in England,' was Macaulay's comment, 'is as likely as a fall of the moon.' He might have recalled his own apocalyptic vision, nine years before, of an infatuated people plunging from universal suffrage to universal anarchy, and finally seeking peace among the ruins under the sword of a dictator. But Peel's words had come true, and more than true: in the enjoyment of physical comfort people were forgetting that plans for the subversion of society had ever existed. The Great Exhibition was the Victorian *Ara Pacis*. The War Office had indeed arranged a secret concentration of troops round the capital, but they were three years out of date. Among the papers relating to the Exhibition there is one of quaint significance, a set of reports from the custodians of the various gardens and museums that were open to the public. The prevailing note is one of shy pride in the behaviour of the people. These uncouth creatures from Lancashire and Yorkshire and the Black Country turned out to be very much like everybody else. In such a mood the nation

only needed a foreign enemy to make its recovered unity complete, and when Nicholas I blundered across the line of vision, the last republican, Linton, the engraver, turned the Red Flag into an oriflamme of war.

Deliverance dissolved the alliance of the clerisy and the bourgeoisie. There had already been some plain speaking over the railway mania: the approach of cholera brought some more. In their way, the way of withdrawal rather than aggression, the Tractarians had kept up a protest from the beginning, the more effectual in the long run because it was directed against the spirit of the age and not its circumstances. It is too long to quote, and no one would be so rash as to abridge or paraphrase Newman, but there is a passage at the end of the *Lectures on Justification* of which every word deserves to be weighed by anyone who would understand the weakness at the heart of early-Victorian society. The Christian Socialists rose in open revolt: the Pre-Raphaelites followed. The clerisy were rounding on their old friends. Dickens, always sensitive to the atmosphere of the moment, brought out *Hard Times*, which Macaulay characterized as 'sullen socialism'. Tennyson, the most faithful reflector of the public intelligence, Mill, its most independent critic, reached the same point at the same time. Mill, invited to take part in the periodic agitation for a Business Government, replied with uncommon asperity that he saw no reason to suppose that in the hands of the middle classes things would not be even worse managed than they were already. Tennyson wrote *Maud*. We are nearing the year of earthquake, 1859, the year of *Richard Feverel* and *Omar Khayyâm*, when Darwin produced *The Origin of Species*, Mill his tract *On Liberty*, Ruskin as much of *Unto This Last* as

Thackeray dared to print. The clerisy had indeed delivered themselves.

The fifties are the cradle of the modern mind. It is too soon to determine in the give and take of European thought how much we took and how much we gave. One thing must be acknowledged: we had more arrears to make up than France or Germany. The early-Victorian discipline had in many directions laid a stop on speculation. In the mid-Victorian age it was lifted, but not quite removed. There was less terrorism, but hardly less vigilance. Did not *The Times* reprove Darwin for bringing out *The Descent of Man* while the Commune was in power in Paris? The discipline had come to fit so naturally that it went on being worn when it was already out of date. The Revolution was achieved in an age of profound social peace, stable moral equilibrium, slowly changing habits, and steadily rising incomes. This is what puzzled Lord Acton: there ought to have been a debacle and there was none: the moral fabric held. He was inclined to attribute it to George Eliot. So was George Eliot. It is this blending of liberty and decorum, things elsewhere inconciliabie, that makes the history of our golden age so fascinating to study and so difficult to expound.

One of the last survivors, Mark Rutherford, spoke of those years as having the sustained excitement of a great religious revival. Excitement was Lord Morley's word also. Benn, in a remarkable passage, compared the Victorian public to the Athenian, an analogy at first sight as quaint as a picture of the Parthenon flanking the Albert Hall. But he was right. *Bildung ist Vermittlung*—and if we define a culture as that condition in which a large part of the body politic understands enough of affairs and of the arts and sciences in general to express with confi-

dence a judgement on them, then mid-Victorian culture must rank very high, not only in our own history, but in the history of the world. In the fifties and sixties the intellectual public—the public which took 100,000 copies of the *Cornhill* when Thackeray was editor, supported the great reviews and bought two editions of the *Edinburgh* to read an article on the Talmud—was large, the range of its interests was wide: in its other aspect, it was still the ascendant element in the State. It had the keenness of its fathers without their grimness. Lord Morley used to say that the Oxford Movement and the Free Trade agitation had served as a mental gymnastic to keep the public intelligence in training: the great encounters over Evolution, over the Higher Criticism, like the contest between Gladstone and Disraeli, were held before an audience which knew enough of the matter to judge the merits of the argument, and expected to be convinced before it was asked to decide.

There are no golden ages, really. But there is about those years a confident energy which the first Victorian generation did not possess and the late Victorians lost. Once it failed, and badly, over Schleswig-Holstein. Otherwise, the achievements of the age recounted in succession, the arming of the Volunteers in 1859, the steadiness of Lancashire in the famine, the second Reform Act, the British North America Act, the Education Act of the Liberals, the opening of the Universities, the reform of the Civil Service, the Trade Union and Housing Acts of the Conservatives, give an impression, to my mind at least, of power in equipoise such as no other two decades in our history give. It is a period which would repay more attention than it has received. But it is evident that the idiom of that age is already becoming alien to our



generation, and unless its history is written soon, while the tradition is still living, the truth will never be told at all.

It is here, more than anywhere else, that a young writer needs to take the great historians as his guides. What they all have in common is the power of evolving an issue in a sequence of significant events. In the Victorian age the issues are clear. They have already furnished material for two books, each in its way a masterpiece, and one a classic, Benn's *History of English Rationalism*, and Dicey's *Law and Opinion*. If Elie Halévy's fine *Histoire du Peuple Anglais* is ever finished, there will be a third. Victorian history is, before all things, a history of opinion. To disengage the currents, counter-currents, and cross-currents of thought, to see ideas embodying themselves in institutions and parties, parties and institutions closing in upon ideas, to show old barriers sometimes sapped and sometimes stormed by new opinions, positions once thought impregnable abandoned overnight, and forces once thought negligible returning to unexpected triumphs, that is to write Victorian history. It is only from the great masters, too, that a student can acquire the feeling for significance. In Gibbon's equipment nothing is more miraculous than the judgement which discards whole passages of history, striking in themselves, or fines them down to an epithet or an allusion, to keep the outline clear and the values true. A final assessment of Victorian values will obviously not be possible for many generations to come. To take an example at random: we know how much Victorian materialism and the name of Herbert Spencer meant to awakening Asia; what will it mean to Asia awake? We cannot even guess. It may be a closed episode like phrenology, or an element in some future eclectic system, of transforming power, like Stoicism in

Roman Law. The historian may put his money on the wrong topic. If, in the Victorian age, he puts it on politics or diplomacy, the downfall of aristocracy or the uplift of democracy, I feel fairly certain he will lose it. The clue is not there but in the emergence of disinterested intelligence and the creation of organs for its exercise. The controversies of the mid-Victorian age, its science, its experiments in legislation and administration, are the first trial flights of the modern English mind above the ground on which it moved. Of course it crashed. It will go on crashing. But it did lift. It lifted when Bright at Birmingham called on the municipalities to be 'nobly and liberally expensive for the welfare of the people'. It lifted when Huxley, at Oxford, turned on Wilberforce in such a tempest of cheering that what he was going to say remains for ever unknown. It lifted when the Disinherited Knight struck the shield of his adversary and compelled a reluctant and unbelieving age to acknowledge that the argument must be followed, even if it led to Rome. That is what Victorian history is made of. Of no other age is it so true that the decisive events happened in the intellect. Gibbon might have smiled like a philosopher over Colenso. One can be quite certain he would not have cackled like Dr. Stratford.

The early Victorians were confronted by a problem for which there were no precedents. 'As luck would have it, Providence was on their side', and they solved it beyond their own expectations. The mid-Victorian clerisy used the respite to induce a new spiritual orientation, to enforce a new faith: that truth is not a state but a process, that nothing knowable need remain unknown, and that for everything that is known there is something that can be done. I recently read a volume of essays by one of the

most distinguished living philosophers. It was a very eloquent and very angry claim for freedom, but the author seemed to me to have very little to say that had not already been said in the ninth chapter of *Madam How and Lady Why*. I like to think of Mr. Bertrand Russell taking up his cross and following Charles Kingsley. For a decade or so it seemed as if the mid-Victorians had the future in their hands, as if Mill's ideal of comfort and intelligence spreading downwards in widening circles through a stable society was in sight. But for some reason the promise of the great age was frustrated—or, perhaps, only postponed. It is evident to us now that, as Mr. Churchill has said in another connection, something 'went sour'. England in 1900 is altogether unworthy of England in 1870. The failure of inventive power is only one of many ominous symptoms.

Nacqui *sub Julio* ancorché fosse tardi—

one of my earliest recollections is of a visit to the Abbey to see the wreaths fresh on Browning's grave, and to men of my age it still seems that the setting of the great Victorian lights, Tennyson, Newman, Gladstone, was the closing of an age of genius, the death of Ruskin, so long silent, its end, the old Queen's funeral its solemn epilogue. But, looking back, it seems to me now that what failed in the late-Victorian age was not the succession of great men but a great public.

No doubt material factors were at work, too. There is a suggestive symmetry between 1850 and 1880: the Irish famine and Australian gold stabilized the Victorian system; agricultural depression and South African gold upset it. The plutocracy going up passed the aristocracy coming down. The eighties were uneasy: tremors unfelt

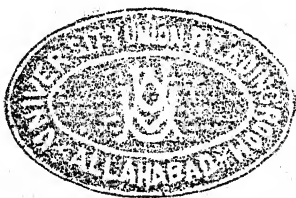
for thirty years and more began to run through society. Engels in old age, re-issuing his *Condition of the Working Class in England 1844*—the book which had projected the image of the Exploiting Capitalist on the imagination of the world-proletariat—was obliged to give reasons why the Revolution which had seemed inevitable then had not come about. They are not of much interest. But this time, he thought, in the early nineties, it was really on its way, and many Englishmen would have agreed with him. As if in compensation for an inward disquiet, England began to look abroad, to take refuge in quantity because quality was failing.

All this, which is the theme of Halévy's last volume, is true and yet not the whole truth. Even Halévy, who has handled the period with a wealth of knowledge and fineness of analysis which no Englishman has shown himself to possess, seems to me to have missed the real trouble, the dilution and dissipation of the intellectual element in Victorian society. As a result of the Reforms of 1867 and 1885 the clerisy was, as a political body, watered down. As a result of the advance of the sciences—including the science of affairs—into regions where the unspecialized intelligence could not follow, it was broken up. It was no longer wanted as an electorate or an expert jury—a *conseil de prud'hommes*. Everywhere the notice-boards were going up: no admittance except on business. Topics which the mid-Victorians could debate in their mutual bearings and within a common framework of reference—science and affairs, literature and history, philosophy and religion—were becoming special subjects, and the average educated man accepted, possibly welcomed, his discharge. The clerisy had neglected Matthew Arnold's advice to surround themselves with a secondary intelli-

gentsia. Rather, they fell back on his father, and the spirit of Thomas Arnold, professionalized by men who lacked his genius, in an age which had discarded his faith, kept the upper-middle class intelligence for two generations in a state of arrested adolescence: his greatest gift, the power of waking up each morning (and waking others up) to rejoice that every question was an open question, could not be imparted by those who had not received it, and the public school mind of the late-Victorian age became a non-transmitting medium round the field where experts were developing the ideas of the mid-Victorian Revolution. The imperishable gains of the Revolution, criticism and the organized application of thought to things, were withdrawn from the light of day and general debate. It was inevitable and even desirable that it should be so. In all but the finest Victorian work there is a constraining deference to the opinions of the high-minded and intelligent men whom I see before me in that box which had to be unlearned. Mill said that a little eccentricity would be a price worth paying for a little more independence. Half his prayer was heard. There was eccentricity enough in the nineties, but independence itself became professional.

The historian of Victorian England must be something of a moralist, because his topic is how inward greatness was attained and lost. The objectivity of the scientific school, the flippancy and conceit of the popular school, are in different ways but equal degrees a distorting medium: through the one the picture is seen too flat, through the other the parts are in wrong proportion. Of so many books called histories, now, one feels that the authors have not *les grandes entrées*: they are writing, at the best from the muniment room, at the worst from the servants' hall. Mr. Strachey has much to answer for.

The skill with which he composes Variations on a Standard Biography for the piccolo cannot be communicated: *incedit Regina*. But when once he had written in fancy script on the back gate of Rugby 'Teacher Arnold's legs are too short', it required no great originality in Mr. Kingsmill to chalk up underneath 'And M. Arnolds got a girl in Switzerland'. I think there are signs that the tide is turning: not only is the general reader beginning to read good history once more, but good writers are beginning to write it: what struck me, for example, about the historical parts of Mr. Sitwell's *Gothick North* was not that they were better written than most histories, but that they were so much better history. If I am right, it is a pledge that, in the rebuilding of a clerisy, a task which must not be delayed if our civilization with its cardinal beliefs in dialectic and personality is to survive the deluge of picture-thinking and mass-suggestion bearing down on us from East and West and always welling up in our midst, history, the rarest and most difficult of the arts, will have a part to play and a service to render.





DESMOND MACCARTHY

## THE SKIRMISHERS

*TWO middle-aged men are sitting at a table on which is spread the remains of a late light breakfast. The room is a ground-floor back-parlour opening on to a small London garden.*

*We are about to hear them discussing a few recent books. I need say little about them, beyond the fact that they are friends who have recently discovered each other, and with something of the mutual surprise of lovers. If, however, either were guaranteeing the other for an insurance policy, each could say that he had known his friend thirty-five years. Their real intimacy is only a few months old, but they were acquainted as children and again at the University. Thus they have, though they lost sight of each other during long periods, memories in common. The younger of the two is a widower and a literary journalist; the elder a bachelor who possesses, to use a slightly ludicrous phrase of Mrs. Meynell's, 'an exquisite style from which to refrain', and what usually goes with it, modest private means. He has refrained, however, from a good many other things in life beside; while his friend has been a gobbler up of miscellaneous experience, often devouring more than he could digest. The subjects which, in future, they discuss together may make it desirable to sketch their personalities and their pasts, but this month, their topics being a book or two, and their attitude towards those topics being intellectual, I need not trouble you even with their names.*

*'I've got to show up my article on Somerset Maugham by five o'clock à propos of Cakes and Ale. I am going to call it, "An English Maupassant".*

*'I hate those labels an English this and English that.*

Silly. They only pretend to say something. However, if you want, incidentally, to compare Maupassant and Maugham, (It's doing Maugham handsome), there's no harm. They're both grim, and as a rule what they see most clearly in human-nature is *not* to its credit, but there resemblance ends unless you dwell on both having written short stories. Hardly necessary I should have thought. Surely the main fact about Somerset Maugham is that he is a dramatist? Judging by reports the most persuasive wild horses wouldn't drag me to one of his plays; still, he's a "leading dramatist". Maupassant was a novelist and short-story writer who wrote one play. What's your idea?

'My idea? I've a cluster of them but they seem to hang from that comparison. I'm looking for a formula for Somerset Maugham. I must have a formula, and that one seems fairly central—Both pessimists, you see, both realists, both conscious of the cruelty and hypocrisy of love. There you are! . . . Both respect lust when not masked as "love"; both are amused at sneaking pettiness in human nature; both are aware of the ubiquity of egotism—and of its *necessity*; both are grimly conscious of the struggle between individuals *and* between Man and Nature (Disease, old-age, death must beat him); both are incapable of belief in religion, a next world, spiritual consolation, but are occasionally sentimental about characteristics produced by such delusions. Remember Maugham's Mother Superior in *The Painted Veil*? Very sentimental. They both see the vulgar ruthlessness of the rich, climbing world, and half enjoy it, half hate it. Then, they remember there is no rationalist's case against such people and paint them in blacker than ever. Both love travel, that consolation for disillusioned sex-experience

and misanthropy. *Voilà*, "The English Maupassant"! And listen, here's my discovery . . .'

'Listen indeed! You're leaving out—Heaven's what are you *not* leaving out! Literature. Don't dream of "discovering" anything yet. Maupassant could write—I know what you are going to say, "the young in France don't think so".'

'I wasn't.'

'Well anyway, they're mostly fools. Never in my life have I witnessed such a literary *dégringolade* as modern French criticism. Look at their fiction too! A period when M. Gide is considered a great novelist, M. Valéry a great poet!'

'O, don't go off on that. Remember my article, or I shall have to go up and write.'

'Well, I repeat, Maupassant was not Flaubert's pupil for nothing. If he wrote realistically, he also wrote sonorously. Sonority, compression, clarity, directness . . .'

'Clarity, directness? Well, if you praise . . .'

'Now I *do* know what you are going to say, "Maugham is clear and direct". He is—with a difference. I admit he is "clear and direct". His style is that of a man with a contempt for flim-flam decorations. All honour to him. I respected *Human Bondage*. It was very thorough. One been through something when one had finished it. But did I want to remember what? No. In that respect it faintly reminded me of that *American Tragedy* you made me read, you brute; faintly it is true. For that experience *was* the old legal ordeal of being "Pressed". You remember?—weights slowly piled upon the victim till at last his breast-bone cracks. His people were usually allowed to hasten it by sitting on him, and while reading Dreiser I felt like howling for every friend and relation I had in

the world! The slow pressure of accumulated detail must of course at last take effect. You want me to admit that Maugham's writing is direct. It is. But what a dogged drab directness! No grace, no rhythm, no poetry—not a sign of an artist's ambition to . . . to attain the . . . in a word, Somerset Maugham is satisfied in literature with the *adequate*. Can I say more? The adequate—pooh.'

'The "adequate" word isn't always so easy to find is it? It didn't drop from your lips a second ago. Really, I don't think you'd talk like this if you had read the book I wanted you to.'

'Honestly? *The Gentleman in the Parlour*? I did look into it. I was put off by the title and the preface. A man who could call a book of Oriental travel *The Gentleman in the Parlour* because Hazlitt in an essay had said such a man was an enviable fellow and that it was jolly being unknown and independent, has no literary sense. Why, he couldn't name a kitten!'

'That's my discovery!'

'What! that he has no literary sense? I thought . . .'

'No, that he was not *born* with a sense for words, but that by sheer and splendid persistence he has acquired one. From the first he had plenty to say. He had the necessary courage to develop consistently, (that's saying a great deal), and a definite temperament without which no writer can impress, nor a book have unity of tone. You and I never really agree about authors or books. You *can't* read a man whose temperament does not respond first and foremost to the glory of words, who does not feel his medium to be the end. I'm a duffer compared with you as a judge of what it is the fashion to call "texture" in writing, though I can tell the difference between silk and ticking. *But*, my dear, I wouldn't swap my sense

of proportion for yours. No. Because while I can learn from you, it's much harder for you to see the merits I see best. I can learn to appreciate, just as Somerset Maugham has learnt at last to handle, words. But unless a writer has an artist's attitude towards his medium, you, from sheer disgust, can't see he has perhaps an artist's attitude towards life. You think I'm a dolt to compare Maupassant and Maugham, though he has written short stories Maupassant would have gladly signed—the two civil servants in *The Casuarina Tree* for instance . . .'

'I do because Maupassant, *pace les jeunes ferores* could write. Do you remember the snow in *Mlle. Perle*?

"La neige s'était remise à tomber depuis une heure, et les arbres en étaient chargés. Les sapins pliaient sous ce lourd vêtement livide, pareils à des pyramides blanches, à d'énormes pains de sucre; et on apercevait à peine, à travers le rideau gris des flocons menus et pressés, les arbustes plus légers, tout pâles dans l'ombre. Elle tombait si épaisse, la neige, qu'on y voyait tout juste à dix pas. Mais la lanterne jetait une grande clarté devant nous." Every statement in that passage is commonplace—if you like. No one would call it "imaginative" prose. Yet in its movement, apart from the appeal of each statement to the optic nerve, there is a *feeling* of quietly falling snow and a smothered earth. You know perfectly well the difference between adequate description and that writing which also communicates emotion by means which are really more direct and complete than mere statement. Don't pretend. You bow to my superior literary discrimination simply in order to inform me, *me!* that I can only discern art and temperament in *words*. I'll meet you on that point—and in this connection, Maupassant and Maugham. Here is a difference between them which

you'll appreciate. You say they are both pessimists. Well, compare the respective depths of their pessimistic temperaments. What made Tolstoy admire Maupassant was the profound despair which runs through his work: only the joys of the sense seemed worth a dump to him and all flesh was grass. Reading *Sur l'eau*, perhaps Maupassant's most impressive book, is like reading the Old Testament part of the Burial Service and skipping the rest. (By the by I never thought St. Paul's reply very cogent.) Maupassant's is a serious jet-black pessimism. Tolstoy admired his stories (except his man-of-the-world anecdotes) because Maupassant grasped with the lucidity of genius the nothingness of life without religion: he had told all the truth he saw. Do you remember his description of the awful constriction of the heart which seized him when he, for whom everything worth having was over, met those two young lovers descending the mountain side near Cannes? And his meditations as he listened sleepless to creaking of the rigging of his yacht at night? Where, where in the stories of Maugham, excellent as they often are, do we plumb such depths? I have never had the presumption myself (never having been driven irrationally to a decision) to decide whether life is, or is not, worth living. But this I do know. While out of despair may spring beauty and a challenge to joy, out of mere disappointment with human-nature, out of a hipped and resentful resignation nothing can come of much significance in literature.'

'Well, all I can say is that if you read *The Gentleman in the Parlour* (in spite of its title), I don't believe you would compare it unfavourably with *Sur l'eau*. It has pages which I shall certainly remember as long, and sketches of strange lives in it and odd lonely people, which I read



with great admiration. If its pessimism is less poignant, isn't it less pathological? Surely a gain. In Maupassant the shadow of impending madness too often lies across his picture. It is not, fortunately, life as we know it. But I'm grateful to you. What you have said confirms me in my determination to label Maugham the "*English Maupassant*". I see now all the label implies. Suppose a foreigner described us as "a fine good-natured race", you would say, wouldn't you, that such praise though temperate was well placed? It hits one of our leading characteristics. We *are* a good-natured race, and that can't be said of either Celts or Latins or Teutons. Nor of the Americans, they are too excitable. It is our strength in governing and makes us easy to govern. It has had a profound influence on our fiction. Some day I mean to write a marvellous article on Good-nature in Art. Good-nature is sometimes the novelist's good genius, sometimes his ruin. Defoe is so good-natured that even the basest characters in *Moll Flanders* appear thoroughly amiable. He moralises severely and holds up his hands in horror at their deeds, but his disapproval never gets into his picture. It is part of his charm though the effect is sometimes ludicrous. In Fielding, basic English good-nature on the other hand adds weight to his judgements. It is inseparable from his easy-going imperturbable sense. And take Dickens. There you have three typical English novelists! Without his warm-hearted good-nature where would Dickens be? It enabled him to take characters and situations as jokes out of which other writers might have made excruciating reading. Think of Dickens' Gamps and shrews! Imagine the "Barkis is willin'" chapter in *David Copperfield* written by a Frenchman! How nasty the carrier's wooing of the buxom Peggotty would have been.

There you have good-nature inspiring the writer. Now for the way it may hamper him.'

'Good Heavens, I hope you aren't going to tell a gullible public that Somerset Maugham is a good-natured writer!'

'Hardly, you underrate my brains. He is the reverse, but (this is my point) he was brought up in our national atmosphere and he had to get a hearing from a good-natured audience. With his temperament and talent England was the worst country he could have been born in. It is only now and then you meet an Englishman who can even tolerate drastic treatment of a subject. They want everything written down to a kindly easy-going sensible level. Therefore "an English Maupassant" is almost an impossibility. What I admire in Maugham is that he has approximated to being one. And as he gets nearer he writes better and better. He kept his temperament completely out of his plays—his view of life, until he wrote *The Circle*, *Our Betters* and, in collaboration, dramatized his own Maupassant-like story *Rain*. His early plays were merely adroit—null. But in his fiction he always allowed his real feelings to tell from the first up to a certain point. And the most interesting thing about him *now*, is that he has learnt at last to express them not only in choice of subject and casual cynical asides, but in the very tone of his writing—in short as an artist. Surely you saw the extraordinary merits of *Cakes and Ale*?'

'I suppose I did. But I disliked its flavour. There must be some desirable life somewhere to make a book worth reading. In *Cakes and Ale* there was none. The style though amazingly adequate was not beautiful. Did you notice the stupid pronouncement he dropped by the way about "beauty"? He said that the falsest statement in English

literature was Keats's line "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever". He said beauty was something you instantly tired of. That gives you the measure of his insensibility. Maupassant would never have said that of a fine page of prose. Of course the exact opposite is true. To a beautiful thing we return again and again. He was rather proud of being bored by Pater, I noticed.'

'Yes, he was muddled about beauty. He meant that about perfection there was nothing interesting to say. You can only point.'

'Well, that isn't true.'

'He muddled the two senses in which things can be interesting, interesting to the discursive intellect and permanently interesting to the æsthetic emotions. But that's a detail. You say there was no desirable life in the book! What, wasn't "Rosie" worth watching and loving? I can't tell you how I admired the skill with which she was presented; how her significance was allowed to dawn gradually on the reader. And when he had created her in all her softly-glowing charm and her delicious honest kindness, how I respected him for not killing her in order to leave her in the pathetic, becoming light of early death. The final appearance of "Rosie" in New York as a game old bridge-playing woman of seventy, still in love with life, was no doubt a shock to the sentimental. But what a salutary shock! Though age slowly transforms beauty as death destroys it suddenly, in either case what has been has been. And it is sentimental to wish the "pilgrim soul" in "Rosie" snuffed out just to avoid the disillusionment of seeing her old, fat, red, made-up and happy. But to meet on general grounds.

'There couldn't be much desirable life in the book. Its theme is a merciless examination of the way tropically

luxuriant reputations in literature are artificially stimulated. First, we were shown a "great writer" as he appears to others before his reputation is made; then the crowd of parasitical worshippers who get round him and get glory from glorifying him, men and women. Very well drawn they were. If "Driffield", the author, had been a self-boasting impostor, the theme would not have been half so interesting. But "Driffield" was a genuine writer though not a great one, and the sardonic wink with which he took his apotheosis proved him genuine. The real man slipped through life unseen, both by those who thought him common and dull and those who thought him great.'

'By the by, you know how much resentment has been created, by the portraits in the book? How are you going to handle that ticklish matter?'

'Of course Maugham sometimes had real people at the back of his mind. "Driffield" isn't Hardy, but he was suggested by Hardy. Maugham thinks Hardy overrated. That's clear because he introduces criticism of "Driffield's" novels which resembles what a man who thought small beer of Hardy would write about him. Every novelist must sometimes have real people at the back of his mind in writing, and many readers will guess who they were. But he ought to dispense with the surface and contingent characteristics of his originals, especially if he makes them cut poor figures in his story. He ought to snip off labels. I can't say that Somerset Maugham has been either careful or considerate in that respect. But I must go up and write.'

'Afterwards I suppose you'll "run about the city grinning like a dog". But be back for dinner. There's a bird.'

## READERS' REPORTS

*The Life of Robert Burns*, by Catherine Carswell. (Chatto & Windus. 15s.) 'Of charity towards Burns', says Mrs. Carswell in her preface, 'I have felt no need.' She thus raises the moral question even before the book begins. It seems a pity, it gives one a tired feeling; thus flatly challenged, however, one can only disagree. The biographer herself does not, of course, mean that his life was spotless; she is even severe on his political apostasy. The defiance really covers the erotic actions and utterances of the bard, in which to-day 'the best minds', she declares, 'can find nothing shocking'. They were simply manifestations of 'the normal man'. If by the normal man she means the common man, her defence is not impressive; if she means man unsophisticated, it is highly questionable; if she means man as he should be, it is hopeless. Whatever might be the ideal man's procedure on such points, it would not include the begetting of more children than he could afford, nor, one may hope, facetious comments when they died in childhood.

Nor was 'frankness' always the keynote of the poet's amorous dealings. His doling out of secret 'marriage lines' can only be described as fishy, and his own moral standard was anything but firm: it had, in fact, a human tendency to suit his audience. He was quite willing, if his position at the time allowed, to shake his moral head and warn young men against 'th' illicit rove'. He inscribed under Jean Armour's picture, when he married her, 'To err is human, to forgive divine'—a gesture leaving one at first too stunned for laughter. He might, however, with more credit have loved twice as often, and talked far less

consistently, if he had loved more. His sexual impulses were strong, but his personal attachments were at least reasonably tranquil. He selected a woman—the handiest, as a rule, the most accessible—and then ‘battered himself’ into some sort of an affection, for his own credit as a bard. Love affairs that concern the heart so slightly may be blameless enough, but it is difficult to find them either meritorious or interesting; and one gets rather tired, in this long work, of the poet’s ever-changing Jeans and Peggies. His behaviour to them was, in the main, with one or two exceptions, honest and not unkind; in detail it was too frequently detestable. What are we to say for a devotee of the ‘delicious passion’ who, immediately after a love scene with one woman, writes of her to another: ‘I am disgusted with her: I cannot endure her! . . . Here was tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul, and mercenary fawning’?

It will be seen that Mrs. Carswell does not shirk the facts, and in favour of her narrative it may be said that a great many Burns-worshippers will be displeased with it. She relies on her hint about the ‘best minds’ to carry her through. But her account makes it clear that the bard was, in more than love, rather a double-dealer. Being desperately anxious to impress, to dominate, he was also chronically insincere—Mrs. Carswell sets it down to his ‘dramatic nature’. This weakness for the drama led him to pump up tears on some occasions—he looked on it as the done thing—on others to rant in terms that raise a blush for him across the centuries. It is ungracious to harp on faults for which his circumstances were so much to blame; but Mrs. Carswell has explicitly rejected charity. Of course, his rantings were not merely for effect: he himself was easily convinced by them. He reveals himself



throughout as a kind of Scotch Hamlet, living in violent outbursts, but incapable of sustained effort or determined road; mentally and emotionally vigorous, but not simple enough to be really enterprising, nor strong enough to be resigned. He would emigrate; he would go for a soldier; he would never (by Hell!) marry Jean Armour. Wordsworth, in fact, was not far wrong; and Mrs. Carswell might have spared a sneer at him, and two or three sneers at Sir Walter Scott. In several centuries, Scotland produced only two literary men with claims to the first rank; but Scottish critics frequently find this excessive, and must needs be scalping one to leave room for the other. Scott had, admittedly, the better time; can Burns's admirers not forgive it him?

This last admirer, in spite of her new tactics and her new material, leaves Burns in the mind's eye much where she found him. Whether one likes him or not is, as she says, a personal question. Unfortunately his most engaging qualities were writ in water: the fiery presence, the gaiety, the wit, the charm—these even the best biographer can only name. Meanwhile his evil manners have been registered in good, set terms. His strongest sentiment was quite plainly self-esteem—a national trait, and not unlovable when one can laugh at it. But it is difficult to laugh at Burns: pity forbids, and respect also, for he was essentially a serious character, with a great deal of 'manly dignity'; one respects it, but it strikes a chill. Mrs. Carswell relates that he once wrote to Boswell, asking for an introduction; Boswell seems not to have replied, but docketed the letter as from 'Robt. Burns the Poet expressing very high sentiments of me'. What a relief, after all! What a release from the other Scot, coarse, serious, self-educated!

## MERITS IN DETECTIVE NOVELS

Mr. Anthony Berkeley, in his new book, *The Second Shot* (Hodder & Stoughton. 7s. 6d.), opens with a short preface on 'The Future of the Detective Story', in which the following words occur: 'To quote the only reviewer of detective fiction whom we who write it can take seriously: ". . . As to technique, it appears that there are two directions in which the intelligent novelist is at present trying to develop . . .; he may make experiments with the telling of his plot, tell it backwards, or sideways, or in bits; or he may try to develop character and atmosphere"'. And he goes on to indicate his complete agreement with this diagnosis, to suggest that the modern detective novel is tending to hold its readers 'less by mathematical than by psychological ties', that 'the detective story must become more sophisticated'—more like a real novel, in fact; and gives one to understand that *The Second Shot* is his own contribution to the psychologization, if one may coin a word, of the crime story.

As the writer of the words quoted with such appreciation, I find Mr. Berkeley's preface very disarming; and it is with diffidence almost approaching humility that I suggest that his own sample has not quite brought it off. Mr. Berkeley's principal character, who tells the story, and on whom, presumably, the bulk of his 'psychologization' must therefore rest, is, quite frankly, difficult to credit. He starts the book as a Victorian joke, a caricature resembling nothing so much as the hero of that trying volume, *Happy Thoughts*, which somebody recently resuscitated; but in the sequel he develops abilities—it would be unfair to say how—entirely without consonance with the characteristics outlined in the beginning. He is,

in fact, a monstrosity; and monstrosities are not character-drawing. Where Mr. Berkeley does excel is in thumbnail sketches—hardly ‘characters’, these—of the kind of person whom he has met, and knows. There is in this book, for instance, a lady who has ‘affairs’; and there is a point at which all the members of the inevitable house-party believe that the monstrosity has committed the murder. Then comes the following passage: ‘A shadow detached itself from the other shadows and came towards me. “Mr. Pinkerton,” said a deep throbbing voice, “I heard what you said to Armored. You did not deceive her. Still less did you deceive me. Why did you kill my lover, Mr. Pinkerton?”’

‘I admit freely that I simply fled into the house.’ This is the real stuff: all the over-civilized must at one time or another have met that deep, throbbing lady. But Mr. Cyril Pinkerton, I regret to say, is not. For the rest, the book is readable and charming, like all Mr. Berkeley’s work. Mr. Sheringham is there, but, thank goodness, he is not unduly emphasized.

Nevertheless, Mr. Berkeley’s preface is justified in that, of this month’s batch of novels, two of the best depend far more upon their sense of character than upon any complications of plot. I have recommended Mr. C. S. Forester’s work before; I now recommend, and most heartily, *Plain Murder* (*John Lane. 7s. 6d.*), whose title is an adequate description of its contents. It is a story of a murder, there is no mystery of any kind about it, it merely sets out to solve the problem: ‘Why did X become a murderer? and why did Y and Z consent to be his accomplices?’ It is short, as novels go: there is not much in it beyond the central problem which I have stated; and the more savage critics may object that Y and Z

allow themselves to be involved in the crime rather easily. I can only say that, personally, I found Mr. Forester's explanation entirely convincing; that I have gained from him a glimpse into the lives of City clerks and into their motives for murder which is quite as revealing as the Thompson-Bywaters case; and that the book is excellently written. I wish there were more like it.

The second example is Mr. Philip Macdonald's *Rynox* (*Collins. Crime Club. 7s. 6d.*), which is incomparably the best book which that prolific writer has yet produced. (The standards of the Crime Club adjudicators are a little surprising: they awarded Mr. Macdonald a 'prize mention' for a book called *The Link* which was not nearly so good as this one, and they gave their November

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recommendation to Mr. Fielding's *The Wedding Chest Mystery*, which, while less heavy than some of its author's previous work, cannot hold a candle to *Rynox*.) In *Rynox* there is not much mystery. I cannot suppose that, in writing his first chapter, Mr. Macdonald was unaware that he was handing out ample clues for the deciphering of the mystery of the Rynox director's death. But there is character-drawing, and, more than that, there is a certain almost macabre gusto which appears to derive from Dickens and Fielding, and which is all too absent in the modern crime story. The average crime writer of to-day, even the good crime writer, when he desires to be funny, is too likely to be flippant; and though flippancy is a quality for which there is much to be said, in bulk it is apt to pall. Mr. Macdonald's humorous characters are funny with vigour and violence, and if some of them came from *Treasure Island* they are none the worse for that.

Character-drawing, however, is not the entire future of the detective novel. The next two in this batch stand mainly by ingenuity of plot, and the third by the mind of the man who wrote it. It is a pleasure to recommend *The Ticker-Tape Murder*, by Milton R. Propper (*Faber & Faber*, 7s. 6d.), both for its own sake and because it is an indication that Americans can write 'straight' detective novels when they want to. Mr. Propper's book is not peppered with slugs and gunmen, or disfigured with sham culture, psychoanalysis, or smart-aleckism. It is a story of the Crofts type, in which the detective steadily and patiently proceeds from point to point until he has solved the mystery, and in which the reader is provided with sufficient information to enable him to make a pretty sound guess at the criminal, if he has the patience and intelligence to do it. It is not a Crofts novel, because it lacks

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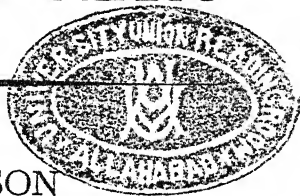


Mr. Crofts' remarkable ingenuity with railway time-tables, problems of hydraulics, etc., but it is a good solid piece of work. In *Mr. Pottermack's Oversight* (Hodder & Stoughton. 7s. 6d.), Mr. Austin Freeman returns to a favourite method, that of explaining the crime before he explains the detection. Mr. Freeman has perfected a technique of his own, which will serve him for book after book, and will only annoy those who dislike having their effects repeated (they will remark, and quite truly, that the plot of this novel is almost exactly that of *The Shadow of the Wolf*). The present reviewer is not one of those who think that port is any less pleasing on Monday because you drank of that very vintage on Sunday, and can confidently place Mr. Freeman as a vintage port. There is less, perhaps, of 'story' in this novel than in some of the very early ones; there is certainly less of the short sketches which made works like *The Eye of Osiris* a perennial delight. But even here the man who put up the sundial is an unmistakeable country-town craftsman, and Dr. Thorndyke is as ingenious as ever. There are not many writers living of whom similar commendation could be made.

And what of the third? *Four Faultless Felons* (Cassell. 7s. 6d.) is not, perhaps, a good Chesterton. Mr. Chesterton's ability to be plausible—never very great—has, as I suggested before in these pages, deserted him since *The Adventures of Father Brown* introduced a new technique to a disillusioned world; and the adventures of the Felons are, to use the mildest possible word, incredible. But the book is written by a man with a mind and a style of his own, which cannot but make itself felt—and what a difference is here from the output of worthy mediocrities!

# LIFE AND LETTERS

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON

## IN A STRANGE TOWN

A morning in a country town in a strange place. Everything quiet. No, there are sounds. Sounds assert themselves. A boy whistles. I can hear the sound above the more immediate ones here where I stand, at a railroad station. I have come away from home. I am in a strange place. There is no such thing as silence. Once I was in the country. I was at the house of a friend. 'You see, there is not a sound here. It is absolutely silent.' That was because he was used to the little sounds of the place, the humming of insects, the sound of falling water—far off—the faint clattering sound of a man with a machine in the distance, cutting hay. He was accustomed to the sounds and did not hear them. Here, where I am now, I hear a beating sound. Someone has hung a carpet on a clothes-line and is beating it. Another boy shouts, far off: 'A-ho, a-ho.'

It is good to go and come. You arrive in a strange place. There is a street facing a railroad track. You get off a train with your bag. Two porters fight for possession of you and the bag, as you have seen porters do with strangers in your own town.

As you stand there, there are things to be seen, too. You

see the open doors of the stores on the street that faces the station. People go in and out. An old man stops and looks. 'Why, there is the morning train', his mind is saying to him.

The mind is always saying such things to people. 'Look, be aware', it says. The fancy wants to float free of the body. We put a stop to that.

Most of us live our lives like toads, sitting perfectly still, under a plantain leaf. We are waiting for a fly to come our way. When it comes, out darts the tongue. We nab it.

That is all. We eat it.

But how many questions to be asked that are never asked. Whence came the fly? Where was he going?

He might have been going to meet his sweetheart. He was stopped, eaten.

The train on which I have been riding, a slow one, pauses for a time. All right, I'll go to the Empire House. As though I cared.

It is a small town, this one, to which I have come. In any event, I'll be uncomfortable here. There will be the same kind of brass bed as at the last place to which I went, unexpectedly like this—with bugs in it, perhaps. A travelling salesman will talk in a loud voice in the next room. He will be talking to a friend, another travelling salesman. 'Trade is bad,' one of them will say. 'Yes, it is rotten.'

There will be confidences about women picked up—some words heard, others missed. That is always annoying.

But why did I get off the train here at this particular town? I remember that they said there was a lake here—that there was fishing. I thought I would fish.

Perhaps I expected to swim. I remember now.

'Porter, where is the Empire House? Oh, the brick one.

All right, go ahead. I'll be along pretty soon. You tell the clerk to save me a room, with a bath, if they have one.'

\* \* \* \*

I remember what I was thinking about. All my life since that happened I have gone off on adventures like this. A man likes to be alone sometimes.

Being alone doesn't mean being where there are no people. It means being where people are all strangers to you.

\* \* \* \*

There is a woman crying there. She is getting old, that woman. Well, I am myself no longer young. See how tired her eyes are. There is a younger woman with her. In time that younger woman will look exactly like her mother.

She will have the same patient resigned look. The skin will sag on her cheeks, that are plump now. The mother has a large nose and so has the daughter.

There is a man with them. He is fat and has red veins in his face. For some reason I think he must be a butcher.

He has that kind of hands, that kind of eyes.

I am pretty sure he is the woman's brother. Her husband is dead. They are putting a coffin on the train.

They are people of no importance. People pass them casually. No one has come to the station to be with them in their hour of trouble. I wonder if they live here. Yes, of course they do. They live somewhere, in a rather mean little house, at the edge of the town, or perhaps outside the town. You see, the brother is not going away with the mother and daughter. He has just come down to see them off.

They are going, with the body, to another town where the husband, who is dead, formerly lived.

The butcher-like man has taken his sister's arm. That is a gesture of tenderness. Such people make such gestures only when someone in the family is dead.

The sun shines. The conductor of the train is walking along the station platform and talking to the station-master. They have been laughing loudly, having their little joke.

That conductor is one of the jolly sort. His eyes twinkle—as the saying is. He has his little joke with every station-master, every telegraph operator, baggage man, expressman, along the way. There are all kinds of conductors of passenger-trains.

There, you see, they are passing the woman whose husband has died and is being taken away somewhere to be buried. They drop their joke, their laughter. They become silent.

A little path of silence made by that woman in black, and her daughter, and the fat brother. The little path of silence has started with them at their house, has gone with them along streets to the railroad station, will be with them on the train and in the town to which they are going. They are people of no importance but they have suddenly become important.

They are symbols of Death. Death is an important, a majestic thing, eh?

\* \* \* \*

How easily you can comprehend a whole life when you are in a place like this, in a strange place, among strange people. Everything is so much like other towns you have been in. Lives are made up of little series of circumstances. They repeat themselves over and over, in towns everywhere, in cities, in all countries.



They are of infinite variety. In Paris, when I was there last year, I went into the Louvre. There were men and women there making copies of the works of the Old Masters that were hung on the walls. They were professional copyists.

They worked painstakingly, were trained to do just that kind of work, very exactly.

And yet no one of them could make a copy. There were no copies made.

The little circumstances of no two lives anywhere in the world are just alike.

\* \* \* \*

You see, I have come over into a hotel room now, in this strange town. It is a country-town hotel. There are flies in here. A fly has just alighted on this paper on which I have been writing these impressions. I stopped writing and looked at the fly. There must be billions of flies in the world and yet, I dare say, no two of them are alike.

The circumstances of their lives not just alike either.

\* \* \* \*

I think I must have come away from my own place on trips, such as I am on now, for a specific reason.

At home I live in a certain house. There is my own household, the servants, the people of my household. I am a professor of philosophy in a college in my town, hold a certain definite position there, in the town life and in the college life.

Conversations in the evening, music, people coming into our house.

Myself going to a certain office, then to a classroom where I lecture, seeing people there.



I know some things about those people. That is the trouble with me, perhaps. I know something but not enough.

My mind, my fancy, becomes dulled looking at them. I know too much and not enough.

\* \* \* \*

It is like a house in the street in which I live. There is a particular house in that street—in my home town—I was formerly very curious about. For some reason the people who lived in it were recluses. They seldom came out of their house, and hardly ever out of the yard, into the street.

Well, what of all that?

My curiosity was aroused. That is all.

I used to walk past the house with something strangely alive in me. I had figured out this much. An old man with a beard and a white-faced woman lived there. There was a tall hedge, and once I looked through. I saw the man walking nervously up and down, on a bit of lawn, under a tree. He was clasping and unclasping his hands and muttering words. The doors and shutters of the mysterious house were all closed. As I looked, the old woman with the white face opened the door and looked out at the man. Then the door closed again. She said nothing to him. Did she look at him with love, or with fear, in her eyes? How do I know? I could not see.

Another time I heard a young woman's voice, although I never saw a young woman about the place. It was evening and the woman was singing—a rather sweet young woman's voice it was.

\* \* \* \*

There you are. That is all. Life is more like that than

people suppose. Little odd fragmentary ends of things. That is about all we get. I used to walk past that place all alive, curious. I enjoyed it. My heart thumped a little.

\* \* \* \*

I was curious enough to ask my friends along the street about the people.

‘They’re queer,’ people said.

Well, who is not queer?

The point is that my curiosity gradually died. I accepted the queerness of the life of that house. It became a part of the life of my street. I became dull to it.

\* \* \* \*

I have become dulled to the life of my own house, of my street, to the lives of my pupils.

Where am I? Who am I? Whence came I? Who asks themselves these questions any more?

\* \* \* \*

There is that woman I saw taking her dead husband away on the train. I saw her but for a moment before I walked over to this hotel and came up to this room (an entirely commonplace hotel room it is), but here I sit thinking of her. I reconstruct her life, go on living the rest of her life with her.

Often I do things like this, come off alone to a strange place like this. ‘Where are you going?’ my wife says to me. ‘I am going to take a bath,’ I say.

My wife thinks I am a bit queer, too, but she has grown used to me. Thank God, she is a patient and a good-natured woman.

‘I am going to bathe myself in the lives of people about whom I know nothing.’



I will sit in this hotel until I am tired of it, and then I will walk in strange streets, see strange houses, strange faces. People will see me.

Who is he?

He is a stranger.

\* \* \* \*

That is nice. I like that. To be a stranger sometimes, going about in a strange place, having no business there, just walking, thinking, bathing myself.

To give others, the people here in this strange place, a little jump at the heart, too—because I am something strange.

Once, when I was a younger man, I would have tried to pick up a girl. Being in a strange place, I would have tried to get my jump at the heart out of trying to be with her.

Now I do not do that. It is not because I am especially faithful—as the saying goes—to my wife, or that I am not interested in strange and attractive women.

It is because of something else. It may be that I am a bit dirty with life and have come here, to this strange place, to bathe myself in strange life and get clean and fresh again.

\* \* \* \*

And so I walk in such a strange place. I dream. I let myself have fancies. Already I have been out into the street, into several streets of this town, and have walked about. I have aroused in myself a little stream of fresh fancies, clustered about strange lives, and as I walked, being a stranger, going along slowly, carrying a cane, stopping to look into stores, stopping to look into the windows of houses and into gardens, I have, you see,

aroused in others something of the same feeling that has been in me.

I have liked that. To-night, in houses of this town, there will be something to speak of.

'There was a strange man about. He acted queerly. I wonder who he was.'

'What did he look like?'

An attempt to delve into me, too, to describe me. Pictures being made in other minds. A little current of thoughts, fancies, started in others, in me, too.

\* \* \* \*

I sit here in this room in this strange town, in this hotel, feeling oddly refreshed. Already I have slept here. My sleep was sweet. Now it is morning and everything is still. I dare say that, sometime to-day, I will get on another train and go home.

But now I am remembering things.

Yesterday, in this town, I was in a barber's shop. I got my hair cut. I hate getting my hair cut.

'I am in a strange town, with nothing to do, so I'll do it,' I said to myself as I went in.

A man cut my hair. 'It rained a week ago,' he said. 'Yes,' I said. That is all the conversation there was between us.

However, there was other talk in the shop, plenty of it.

A man had been here in this town and had passed some bad cheques. One of them was for ten dollars and was made out in the name of one of the barbers in that shop.

The man who passed the cheques was a stranger, like myself. There was talk of that.

A man came in who looked like President Coolidge, and had his hair cut.

Then there was another man who came for a shave. He was an old man with sunken cheeks, and for some reason looked like a sailor. I dare say he was just a farmer. This town is not by the sea.

There was talk enough in there, a whirl of talk.

\* \* \* \*

I came out thinking.

Well, with me it is like this. A while ago I was speaking of a habit I have formed of going suddenly off like this to some strange place. 'I have been doing it ever since it happened,' I said; I used the expression 'it happened'.

Well, what happened?

Not so very much.

A girl got killed. She was struck by an automobile. She was a girl in one of my classes.

She was nothing special to me. She was just a girl—a woman, really—in one of my classes. When she was killed I was already married.

Well, she used to come into my room, into my office. We used to sit in there and talk.

We used to sit and talk about something I had said in my lecture.

'Did you mean this?'

'No, that is not exactly it. It is rather like this.'

I guess you know how we philosophers talk. We have almost a language of our own. Sometimes I think it is largely nonsense.

I would begin talking to that girl—that woman—and on and on I would go. She had grey eyes. There was a sweet serious look on her face.

Do you know, sometimes, when I talked to her like that (it is, I am pretty sure, all nonsense), well, I thought. . . .

Her eyes seemed to me sometimes to grow a little larger as I talked to her. I had a notion she did not hear what I said.

I did not care much.

I talked so that I would have something to say.

Sometimes, when we were together in that way, in my office in the college building, there would come odd times of silence.

\* \* \* \*

No, it was not silence. There were sounds.

There was a man walking in a hallway in the college building outside my door. Once when this happened I counted the man's footsteps. Twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight.

I was looking at the girl—the woman—and she was looking at me.

Well, you see, I was an older man. I was married.

I am not such an attractive man. I did, however, think she was very beautiful. There were plenty of young fellows about.

\* \* \* \*

I remember now that when she had been with me like that—after she had left—I used to sit sometimes for hours alone in my office as I have been sitting here, in this hotel room in a strange town.

I sat thinking of nothing. Sounds came in to me. I remembered things of my boyhood.

I remembered things about my courtship and my marriage. I sat like that dumbly, a long time.

I was dumb, but I was at the same time more aware than I had ever been in my life.

It was at that time I got the reputation with my wife



of being a little queer. I used to go home, after sitting dumbly like that, with that girl, that woman, and I was even more dumb and silent when I got home.

'Why don't you talk?' my wife said.

'I'm thinking,' I said.

I wanted her to think I was thinking of my work, my studies. Perhaps I was.

\* \* \* \*

Well, the girl, the woman, was killed. An automobile struck her when she was crossing a street. They said she was absent-minded—that she walked right in front of a car. I was in my office, sitting there, when a man, another professor, came in and told me. 'She is quite dead, was quite dead when they picked her up,' he said.

'Yes.' I dare say he thought I was pretty cold and unsympathetic—a scholar, eh? having no heart.

'It was not the driver's fault. He was quite blameless.'

'She walked right in front of the car?'

'Yes.'

I remember that at the moment I was fingering a pencil. I did not move. I must have been sitting like that for two or three hours.

\* \* \* \*

I got out and walked. I was walking when I saw a train, so I got on.

Afterward I telephoned my wife. I don't remember what I told her at that time.

It was all right with her. I made some excuse. She is a patient and a good-natured woman. We have four children. I dare say she is absorbed in the children.

I came to a strange town and I walked about there. I forced myself to observe the little details of life. That

time I stayed three or four days and then I went home.

At intervals I have been doing the same thing ever since. It is because at home I grow dull to little things. Being in a strange place like this makes me more aware. I like it. It makes me more alive.

\* \* \* \*

So you see it is morning, and I have been in a strange town, where I know no one and no one knows me.

As it was yesterday morning, when I came here, to this hotel room, there are sounds. A boy whistles in the street. another boy, far off, shouts 'A-ho'.

There are voices in the street, below my window, strange voices. Someone, somewhere in this town, is beating a carpet. I hear the sound of the arrival of a train. The sun is shining.

I may stay here in this town another day, or I may go on to another town. No one knows where I am. I am taking this bath in life, as you see, and when I have had enough of it I shall go home feeling refreshed.

DILYS POWELL

## EDITH SITWELL

The patronymic epithet remains rare: with Wellsian and Shavian the twentieth-century catalogue is nearly done.

For 'Sitwellian' the docility of the name may be partly responsible; but this is surely a case where free will must be reckoned with as well as predestination. Nobody would deny the Sitwells a talent for publicity. From the start their contumacy under criticism awakened a new respect in readers suddenly aware that the Muses' bower might be also a hornets' nest.

Their personalities soon attracted the parodist: Max Beerbohm popularized the profiles of Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, Edith Sitwell was caricatured in a revue. Sitwell poetry invaded the concert room and was delivered to the accompaniment of William Walton's music. Sitwell views on art provided the journalist with a new joke. There were busts of the Sitwells, portraits of the Sitwells; even *Who's Who* attested their eccentricity ('took an intense dislike to simplicity, morris-dancing, a sense of humour, and every kind of sport excepting reviewer-baiting,' said Edith Sitwell; 'abandoned all other athletic interests in order to urge the adoption of new sports such as Pelota, Kif-Kif, and the Pengo (especially the latter)' said Osbert). The social historian of the twentieth century will have, in his search for material, little with which to reproach the works of the Sitwells, save, perhaps, the inattention of the Home Secretary.

Choosing from a trinity is a difficult matter; but since we are here concerned with poetry, and since Miss Edith

Sitwell has devoted herself more exclusively than either of her brothers to the writing of verse, it is justifiable to base on her work this short study of the Sitwellian. I shall attempt, then, to discover what qualities in the poetry of Miss Sitwell are characteristic; to estimate the value of those qualities as a contribution to English verse: in short, to place the Sitwell blend of aristocratic, exotic, and wayward in its relation to the general movement of contemporary writing.

Let us look first at the subjects with which Miss Sitwell deals.

Two themes are prominent in Miss Sitwell's earliest published work; that is to say, in *The Mother* (1915); in *Twentieth Century Harlequinade* (with Osbert Sitwell, 1916); in the first two volumes of the anthology, *Wheels* (1916 and 1917). She is already occupied with the idea of treachery and, proceeding from it, the death of the spirit. She writes of a mother murdered by her son:

They say the Dead may never dream.  
But yet I heard my pierced heart scream  
His name within the dark. They lie  
Who say the Dead can ever die.

She shows us Saul red-handed from the death of his brother. But the tragedy here, the abyss to which she points, is not physical dissolution, but the rot in the spirit which betrays another to his death. Treachery is a frequent motive with Miss Sitwell; the motive of spiritual death is repeated throughout her work. It is sometimes merged in the second of the early themes—in what might be called the Vanity Fair theme. Miss Sitwell is apt to regard the more urban amusements of mankind with asperity, and so, when she wants to emphasize the inanity

of modern civilization, she describes a fashionable concert, or a seaside resort with its heat and its 'noisy light' and its Bank Holiday crowds, 'bright sparks struck out by Time'. But she needs symbolical figures for her Vanity Fair; she needs a setting less localized than the esplanade, more sinister in its gaiety than the Fun Fair. She finds what she wants in the *Commedia dell' arte*; in its glittering, grotesque characters, masked and faintly diabolical, in its fantastic clowning, above all, in its wilful departure from the natural, its shrieking caricature of high spirits. And so, by 1918, the date of *Clowns' Houses* and the third volume of *Wheels*, Miss Sitwell is developing the idea, already suggested, of the Harlequinade—a harlequinade staged in the airless streets of Hell. She is still developing it in the 1919 and 1920 *Wheels* and in *The Wooden Pegasus* (1920). Pantaloon and Scaramouche play together in the 'spangled weather'; Brighella chatters and scolds; Il Dottore sits in his 'rickety top storey',

While an ape, with black spangled veil,  
Plum'd head-dress, face dust-pale,  
Scratch'd with a finger-nail

Sounds from a mandoline,  
Tuneless and sharp as sin—

Again and again in her poetry we meet the *Commedia dell' arte* figures: Harlequin, Il Magnifico, Il Capitaneo, Columbine, Pierrot. Sometimes the puppet-show takes the place of the Harlequinade; sometimes a passage is imitated from the Russian Ballet; always Miss Sitwell uses her material to give the effect of hard, garish light, jangling sound, and an infinite spiritual desolation. Humbert Wolfe turns the Harlequinade into a sentimental romance;

it is characteristic of Miss Sitwell that she makes of it something sharp and bitter.

About the time when Miss Sitwell was first introducing the posturing figures of the Italian Comedy into her poetry, another type of character was also making its appearance. While Pantaloon and Brighella are skirmishing amongst the 'puppet booths' of Hell, Silenus is pilfering the plums in the Deanery garden, and satyrs and naiads are heard laughing between the strawberry beds. The foundations, in fact, of a bucolic style are being laid, and in 1923 a volume of verse is published with the name *Bucolic Comedies*. Miss Sitwell's earliest bucolics are often concerned with what she has herself called 'the animal state of consciousness, shaping itself from within, beginning to evolve shape out of its thick black blot of darkness':

(Queer impulses of bestial kind,  
Flesh indivisible from mind.)

She writes, for instance, of the puppet fumbling for speech:

Yet dust bears seeds that grow to grace  
Behind my crude-striped wooden face  
As I, a puppet tinsel-pink,  
Leap on my springs, learn how to think,

or of the ape dimly aware  
That narrow long Eternity

Is but the whip's lash o'er our eyes—  
Spurring to new vitalities.

Having, however, recorded her conviction that animal consciousness and spiritual consciousness are merely different stages of evolution, that there is 'ape's blood in



each vein', she moves on to a less restricted view of the bucolic scene. She describes the attitude of mind of a country servant coming down at dawn to light the fire; she fills her landscape with dairymaids and goose-girls, amorous satyrs, country squires and old, faded country ladies. But throughout she shows a state of undeveloped or benumbed consciousness; paints vacancy in a kitchen garden, and sets the besotted spirit amongst the roundabouts of a country fair.

From the start, Miss Sitwell showed a gift for nursery rhyme and nonsense verse; and before long she was using this gift to make elaborate experiments in 'texture' and metre. She was writing verses which an inadequate acquaintance with the art of dancing encouraged her to label 'Foxtrot' or 'Hornpipe'; she was writing a new version of 'I do like to be beside the seaside':

When

Don

Pasquito arrived at the seaside

Where the donkey's hide tide brayed, he

Saw the banditto Jo in a black cape

Whose slack shape waved like the sea—

Thetis wrote a treatise noting wheat is silver like  
the sea; the lovely cheat is sweet as foam; Erotis  
notices that she

Will

Steal

The

Wheat-king's luggage, like Babel

Before the League of Nations grew—

So Joe put the luggage and the label

In the pocket of Flo the Kangaroo.

It would be only human to look on this kind of writing as jingle and leave it at that; but no. Miss Sitwell prefixes to *Façade* (1922), in which a number of these experimental verses are collected, an extract from one of her own essays: 'This modern world is but a thin matchboard flooring spread over a shallow hell. For Dante's hell has faded, is dead. Hell is no vastness; here are no more devils who laugh or who weep—only the maimed dwarfs of this life, terrible straining mechanisms, crouching in trivial sands, and laughing at the giants' crumbling.' And, indeed, when one comes to look at them closely, the jingles are not cheerful jingles. Something of the acerbity which informs Miss Sitwell's view of our English Lidos has crept into her rendering of the hornpipe, too; the metrical gaiety is the 'façade' of an interior gloom. 'In those poems', as she puts it elsewhere, 'which deal with the world crumbling to dust, with materialism building monstrous shapes out of the deadened dust, I, for one, use the most complicated dance rhythms which could be found, or else syncopated rhythms which are not dance rhythms.' That is direct enough. Miss Sitwell, in many of these experimental poems, is concerned with 'materialism building monstrous shapes out of the deadened dust'; and she has adopted the view, to which, as we have seen, Mr. Eliot also subscribes, that to express an age of electric trains verse must be all high voltage.

So far Miss Sitwell does not seem to have found much solace in a world 'crumbling to dust'. Treachery and spiritual decay have opened a gulf at her feet. The English seaboard has turned out to be the modern Vanity Fair. The English countryside has proved bucolic beyond endurance. In the present there seems no haven for this acute and irritable mind: there remains the past. And in

the past Miss Sitwell finds the elegance, the grace, the soft civilized beauty which she vainly seeks in the present. It is to her own childhood that she turns for refreshment, to days when

... life still held some promise,—never ask  
Of what,—but life seemed less a stranger, then  
Than ever after in this cold existence.

And in *The Sleeping Beauty* (1924) and *Troy Park* (1925) she carries us with her to the dreaming summers of youth. Within the walls of *Troy Park* the 'sweet and ancient gardens' which were the Eden of that innocent age, singing birds forever move

Among the boughs with silent feathered feet,—  
Spraying down dew like jewels amid the sweet  
Green darkness;

nereids haunt the 'green deep mirrors' of the lake; leaves 'breasted like a dove' murmur romantic tales, and the moonlight tells of 'Circean adventures and far seas'. All day the child wanders with her brothers in 'an hallucination born of silence'; time passes 'suavely, imperceptibly', undarkened as yet by the menace of death.

Life was so beautiful that shadow meant  
Not death, but only peace, a lovely lulling.

But outside the walls the menace waits; death and betrayal are in ambush. And so no Prince Charming comes to break through the 'brutish forests' and entice Miss Sitwell's *Sleeping Beauty* from her safe castle grounds.

'And oh, far best,' the gardener said,  
'Like fruits to lie in your kind bed,—  
To sleep as snug as in the grave  
In your kind bed, and shun the wave,

Nor ever sigh for a strange land  
And songs no heart can understand.'

The Princess dreams on in a garden very like the Troy Park which sheltered Miss Sitwell's own childhood, and, dreaming, symbolizes the lost happiness of youth—and the beauty which Miss Sitwell believes to have vanished from the world.

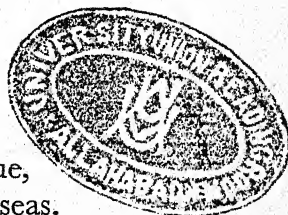
Miss Sitwell, it may be seen, has a personal quarrel with the present, since it has brought a decline from her experience of the past; but, like almost every serious poet now writing, she sees also an historical decline (though this distresses her less). A general feeling of regret for the past finds expression in *Prelude to a Fairy Tale* (1927) and *Elegy on Dead Fashion* (1926). In the *Elegy*, from a rococo lament for 'elegances lost and fled', for the fashion-plate nymphs of the 1840's, who

Walked beside the stream's drake-plumaged waters  
In crinolines of plaided sarsenet,  
Scotch caps, where those drake-curling waters wet

Their elegant insteps.—

for days when

Queen Thetis wore pelisses of tissue  
Of marine blue or violet, or deep blue,  
Beside the softest flower-bells of the seas.



Miss Sitwell goes on by an extravagant transition to mourn the 'ancient time of our primeval innocence'. The nymphs are dead; and now

They engineer great wells into the Styx  
And build hotels upon the peaks of seas  
Where the small trivial Dead can sit and freeze.

Psyche has become a kitchenmaid; the gods are 'Time-crumbled into marionettes'. Death indeed is to be feared, and the 'unreasoning grave' with its 'mountain-high forgetfulness'; but

There are a thousand deaths the spirit dies  
Unknown to the sad Dead that we despise.

And so once more Miss Sitwell comes to the theme of spiritual decay. The years which destroy the dreams of childhood destroy also the integrity of the soul:

Age shrinks our hearts to ape-like dust . . . that ape  
Looks through the eyes where all death's chasms gape  
Between ourselves and what we used to be.

And in *Metamorphosis* (1928) Time, not Death, plays Iago, Time which brings with it

. . . . . that metamorphosis  
When the appalling lion-claws of age  
With talons tear the cheek and heart, yet rage  
For life devours the bone, a tigerish fire?

and freezes the ardent spirit even as it shrivels the body. Miss Sitwell is drifting back to her personal quarrel with the present. In *Gold Coast Customs* (1929) she tries once more to escape into the impersonal with an attack on a society which permits both the slum and the 'cannibal mart' of fashionable life, and which she compares (unfavourably) with the negro culture of Central Africa. For fury and sustained invective this poem is without rival in contemporary verse; it is also remarkable for the discrepancy in size between its guns and their target.

For this painted Plague-Cart's  
Heart, for this

Slime of the Worm that paints her kiss  
And the dead men's bones round her throat and wrist,  
The half of my heart that lay in your breast  
Has fallen away  
To rot and bray  
With the painted mud through the eyeless day.

Miss Sitwell refers to a Society hostess.

Yet it is not fantastic to suggest that, despite herself, in *Gold Coast Customs* Miss Sitwell is harking back once more to personal experience; that the motive behind the poem is not humanitarian indignation so much as rage against a force which besieged Troy Park and in the end reduced it and scattered its garrison. And so it is, I think, throughout Miss Sitwell's work. All her themes can be referred back ultimately to the vain dream of keeping inviolable the citadel of childhood.

In speaking of the subjects with which Miss Sitwell deals I have mentioned certain of her stage properties. I have called attention to her marionettes and her clowns, to the satyrs who, with their complementary naiads, sylphs and ondines, infest her groves and streams. It may be worth while to catalogue some of her other accessories, since they play an important part in her poetry, and since, indeed, stage properties are always important when poetic diction is threatened with a revolution.

In one of the early poems there is a passage obviously imitated from *Goblin Market*; and, throughout her work, Miss Sitwell uses the names of fruits much as Christina Rossetti or Andrew Marvell used them. Nectarines and apricots; plums, apples and cherries; figs, grapes, melons, strawberries—on walled garden and orchard and hot-house Miss Sitwell levies toll. But Troy Park had a



vegetable garden too; and so gherkins, cucumbers, aubergines, and marrows play their part in this Sitwellian harvest festival. Miss Sitwell's flowers, again, are for the most part such as might have grown in Troy Park. Calceolarias, zinnias, fuchsias, marigolds, cinerarias, auriculas, primulas, snapdragons, dahlias, ranunculi, narcissi, carnations, stephanotis—certainly they are a change from the untutored primrose and daffodil and lesser celandine. In her use of both flowers and fruits, we see Miss Sitwell attempting a richly-decorated form of verse which is a challenge to the embarrassingly nude forms of the Georgians. The porphyry and amber, the jacinth, jasper, and topaz which glimmer in her verse are as much a challenge. Even her musical instruments are exotic: the flute and the lute, it is true, she shares with Mr. Wolfe; but her mandoline has a sophisticated, *fin-de-siècle* note, while the *chapeau chinois* is pure rococo. And in her decorative use of names she returns to a tradition almost extinguished since Swinburne. Certain names have a special attraction for her: names, such as Midas and Thetis, gold or silver, in their associations as well as in their sound. But Miss Sitwell has names for every mood. Don Pasquito and Mr. Belaker, Heliogabalusene and Mrs. Behemoth; Susan and Polly and Jane; Helen, Deirdre, Semiramis, Cassandra; Lady Immoraline, Myrrhine, Laidronette, Miss Pekoe, Miss Nettybun; Malibran, Tamburini, Taglioni, Grisi—real or invented, they are poured out inexhaustibly. And these personages are often rigged out in the most peculiar clothing. 'Queen Thetis', as we have seen, wears a pelisse; Cupid has put on 'white nankin trousers and a flat Scotch bonnet'; Venus, decently wrapped in a shawl, drives by in her barouche; while the Bacchantes have bought mittens. This is an early

Victorian revival with a vengeance; so Victorian that even the satyrs dance 'the gallopade and the mazurka, cracoviak, cachucha and the turka.'

Miss Sitwell's feeling for opulent decoration entitles her to be called a baroque poet: with this peculiarity, that her motives are as often derived from the 1840's as from the classics; Balmoral, in her verse, takes the place of Olympus. Her diction certainly has the exuberance of baroque; it has, however, certain other remarkable qualities.

Her use of adjectives is interesting. First one notices the way in which epithets normally reserved for one of the senses are extended to another. Not the wind, but the dew is 'whining'; the light is 'creaking' or 'squealing'; flowers are 'trilling'; breezes 'nachreous', 'wrinkled' or 'withered'; winds 'pig-snouted'. 'The modernist poet's brain', Miss Sitwell explains, 'is becoming a central sense interpreting and controlling the other five senses. . . . His senses have become broadened and cosmopolitanized; they are no longer little islands, speaking only their own narrow language, living their sleepy life alone. When the speech of one sense is insufficient to convey his entire meaning, he uses the language of another.' So far, so good; but we are taken farther. A candle is 'lolloping galloping'; dust is 'decoy-duck' or 'monkey-skin black and white striped'; mud is at once 'eyeless', 'sightless', 'fawning', 'painted', and 'giggling'. This is what Mr. Robert Graves calls the 'free-associative' method: ideas and images may be related not by logic, but by some chance association in the poet's mind—in fact, by caprice. It is, briefly, the thin end of the Gertrude Stein wedge.

The language of poetry is thus extended in Miss Sitwell's work, firstly by the breakdown of the sense

barricades, secondly by the scaling of the ramparts of logic. Miss Sitwell presses her attack at one point in particular.

I always was a little outside life,—

And so the things we touch could comfort me;

she writes of herself as a child; a highly-developed sense of touch makes her constantly use adjectives of surface. Woods are 'bear-furred', leaves 'green baize'; a pool is 'swanskin', grass 'beaver-smooth'; the marrow has 'dog-skin' flowers; a country house 'quilted red satin'; the sea is 'smooth black lacquer'. The last phrase shows yet another peculiarity of Miss Sitwell's style—her trick of comparing the natural thing with the artificial. The leaves, she says, are like green baize; she does not say the green baize is like leaves.

Like a still-room maid's yellow print gown

Are the glazed chintz buttercups of summer.

And we find seas that are 'gilt rococo', trees that 'resemble a great pelerine', a farm-pond 'smooth as a daguerreotype'. The result is to make Miss Sitwell's poetry seem itself more artificial and sophisticated. But, as her stage properties show, it is not the sophistication which uses 'prosaic' material for poetry, not the sophistication of Carlos Williams or the later E. E. Cummings. 'That gold-fingered arborist, the wind'; 'branches gold-mosaic'd as the wave'; 'porphyry bones of nymphs whence grew the rose'; on every page some phrase proclaims the 'artificial' poet. Miss Sitwell's vocabulary is definitely 'poetic'; it is not, as with many modern poets, the language of the navy or of the stockbroker.

I have already mentioned Miss Sitwell's experimental verses, the 'foxtrots' and 'hornpipes', the 'polkas' and

'mazurkas' and 'waltzes', in which she shows her virtuosity. Indeed, when one comes to look at her work as a whole, one finds in it a great variety of metres. The heroic couplet, the octosyllabic couplet, blank verse, rhyming quatrains of two-, four-, or five-stressed lines are all here; and here, too, is a vast quantity of verse as variable from stanza to stanza as *Kubla Khan* or *Goblin Market*. Often, as in her 'foxtrots' and 'mazurkas', Miss Sitwell patents her own metres; caprice or the echo of a syncopated tune alone could be responsible for the form of 'Trio for Two Cats and a Trombone':

Long steel grass—  
The white soldiers pass—  
The light is braying like an ass.  
See  
The tall Spanish jade  
With hair black as nightshade  
Worn as a cockade!

Not only the metrical framework of these experimental poems, however, is peculiar, but also their internal pattern. Miss Sitwell, in an essay on *Poetry and Criticism* (1925), talks (with the airiness one has learned to expect on this subject) of 'the habit of forming abstract patterns in words':

Said Il Magnifico  
Pulling a fico—  
With a stoccado  
And a gambado,  
Making a wry  
Face: 'This corraceous  
Round orchidaceous  
Laceous porraceous  
Fruit is a lie!'

The pattern of those words (from *Façade*) is nothing if not abstract; as Mr. Graves and Miss Riding remark, they defeat the very best dictionary in the end. It is unfortunate that the theory of abstract patterns in words should, like Couéism, so often break down in demonstration classes. Miss Sitwell, happily, is more concerned with rhythm and 'texture' than with 'abstract patterns' (even with verse she must satisfy her sense of touch). And so we find throughout her work an extremely subtle variation of movement and, to pursue the 'touch' metaphor, of surface. She experiments with internal rhymes and assonances, with near-asonances and dissonances and alliteration, with 'the different effect that two one-syllabled words and one two-syllabled word have on rhythm in heightening or slowing the speed'. She tries to give the effect of a drowsy fire:

The purring fire has a bear's dull fur  
or the chill of early spring:

The wooden châlets of the cloud  
Hang down their dull blunt ropes to shroud

Red crystal bells upon each bough  
or the ghostly presence of the moonlight:

Hours passed; the soft melodious moonlight grows. . . .  
A murmurous sound of far-off Circean seas  
And old enchantments and the growth of trees.

(Note the Tennysonian cadence in the last line but one.)

Miss Sitwell is apt in her criticism of poetry to exaggerate the importance of 'texture'; when, for instance, she says that in the line from 'Paradise Lost'

To whom thus the Portress of Hell-gate replied,

“To whom” has the immense bronze-deep clangour and echo of Hell-gate opening and shutting, while the lightening of the last syllable in “replied” brings the line up into the outer air, far from the majesty and splendour of Hell’, she is surely crediting the technique of the line with the beauties which proceed from its associations. But in her own work this interest in ‘texture’ is responsible for a good deal of her success. The truth is that Miss Sitwell, a self-conscious sophisticated writer, submits easily to the discipline of verse, and benefits by the necessity to shape and re-shape her lines. Lawrence, a great *natural* writer, is uneasy under discipline: when he renders the same idea in prose and in verse, what is direct and vivid in the prose is apt to become blurred and cumbrous in the verse. With Miss Sitwell it is just the opposite. The exigencies of verse clarify her ideas, which in prose are often incoherent and repetitive; the same image gains in the verse a richness and a delicacy wanting in the prose. This passage, for example: ‘Yet what, I asked myself, would they do if they were confronted suddenly with the realities which have been served up for them like exotic fruits? They would be as terrified as a negro king seeing for the first time the delicate, the evanescent, the so-unexplainable and untouchable snow. They would be struck silent by the cold of the spirit, that is not like the cold of any winter they have known’, becomes, in verse:

What would these ghosts do, if the truths they know,  
That were served up like snow-cold jewelled fruits,  
And the enfeathered airs of lutes,  
Could be their guests in cold reality?  
They would be shivering  
Wide-eyed as a negro king



Seeing the evanescent mirage snow,—  
They would be silenced by the cold  
That is of the spirit, endlessly,  
Unfabled and untold.

The theme is automatically pitched higher; the verse rhythm points the smooth phrases; and the formality of the medium demands the elaborate diction in which Miss Sitwell is most at home.

What, we may pause to ask at this stage, is the general effect of Miss Sitwell's poetry, of her bizarre mixture of satire and fantasy, 'modernism' and tradition? It is certainly a strange world through which she guides us. It is a world where betrayal is the common lot of the heart, and where the triviality of existence frets the most generous spirit into a travesty of itself. Civilization, in this Sitwellian landscape, is rotting away; gods and heroes are vanished, and a race of dwarfs gropes in the twilight of materialism. Where the business of everyday life goes on it is pursued with a heartless and terrifying gaiety; under a brazen sky the crowds laugh and play like creatures conscious of doom, while in their booths puppets ape the petty vices and bickerings of their masters. Over the countryside a sodden stupidity broods. But 'animal consciousness', perpetually struggling towards the light—the fire muttering with the voice of the beast, the beast claiming blood-kinship with the man—creates the feeling of a vague dark menace: while man sinks the animal rises to mock him. Even such civilization as remains seems compassed about by terrors.

Except in one enchanted spot, which Miss Sitwell has called Troy Park. Within those walls, as we have seen, it is always summer. There the nightingale sings, not of

Philomela's grief, but of her youth before she learned dishonour; innocence can never be deflowered in Troy Park, never, for it is eternally the garden of childhood, the garden where Beauty still dreams. Indeed, over the whole garden with its shining fruits and bright flowers there hangs the air of a dream. Miss Sitwell often draws her themes from fairy-tales or folk-lore; I am inclined to think it is because there she finds just the inconsequence, the distortion, the refracted light of the visions of sleep. Does not the whole of her work give the effect of a dream-scene? Her shrieking clowns and painted puppets with their nightmarish laughter; her satyrs and sylphs and ondines, appearing and vanishing like images between sleep and waking; her wealth of names—Queen Victoria rubbing shoulders with Captain Fracasse, Pharaoh with Miss Nettybun, Absalom with Sir Rotherham Redde, in just the fantastic jumble one remembers after a troubled night: these are all figures in the landscape of a dream. And Miss Sitwell's technique, her imagery and diction strengthen the impression of unreality. They transport us to a topsy-turvy existence, where we can see the wind, hear the light, feel the sky. The elements of the scene have acquired surprising qualities; the sea is 'castanetted', the grass is 'cackling' and the waterfalls are 'goat-footed'. Woods and water grow furred and feathered, and through this bewildering landscape, where the fruit and the flowers have the richness of an opium-eater's visions, glide the exotic forms of Venus, Thetis, and Panope, clad in the fashions of 1843. The very leaves turn tartan in sympathy.

We have, then, a succession of dream-pictures of which the supreme nightmare is Society with its obscene gaiety, 'bunches of nerves that dance'. Across the field of our vision there dart incessantly groups of words that form

and re-form themselves into patterns, and for the moment obscure the object at which we were looking. And this panorama, this poetic cinematograph, is accompanied by the rhythm of a swiftly changing metre to which the characters of the piece jig and posture with lunatic agility. Yet at the centre of the hubbub there remains one tranquil spot—Troy Park. And this spot Miss Sitwell in spirit still inhabits. She has never really left Troy Park; or if, from time to time, she has left it, the brutality and treachery without drove her hastily back. So, living herself within the veil of a dream, the dream which was her own childhood, she looks out at the external world and sees that, too, as a dream. Her view of life remains in essence that of a child, a sensitive child, seeing everything in terms of its own private world. Certainly the child is precocious—and highly sophisticated; for Miss Sitwell, during her sallies into the public world, has acquired armour and weapons. But beneath the sophistication the core of sensitiveness persists; and this combination of the vulnerable and the well-defended it is that makes Miss Sitwell's retorts to her critics so ferocious.

It remains to consider Miss Sitwell's place in the development of English verse. Has she a place at all, or is she outside tradition and incapable of any influence on the main stream of our poetry? Miss Sitwell's first book was published in 1915. The war was only in its second year; the feeling that this was less a war for an ideal than a massacre had scarcely taken hold of the combatants. And if disillusion had not yet undermined the bases of assurance, if the tradition of patriotism and national confidence was still unshaken and the belief in the institutions of society still firm, how much more stable seemed the subjects and forms of verse! The Imagists, however

revolutionary they may have felt, had made little impression on the world. Masfield, it is true, had introduced into a poem about a drunkard language more commonly associated with the Old Kent Road than with poetry. But for the most part English verse was still under the influence of the Wordsworth tradition, a tradition by now so weakened as to be valueless. The new voices in French verse had awakened little echo on this side of the Channel, though here and there some genuine artist, such as Flecker, would declare that we were fifty years behind the times. Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Drinkwater, Wilfred Gibson—the anthology poets were nearly all ‘traditionalists’. And one of the most discouraging features of the tradition was its soberness. Poetry had been stripped of decoration. Rhetoric no longer had a place in English verse.

Into this rustic vacuum the Sitwells suddenly flung their unicorns and their nymphs, their bright metallic landscapes and tinsel harlequinades. I do not say that their example was the most powerful in the years of literary experiment which followed. I do not even say that their *direct* influence has been great. But I do believe that the emphasis on decoration, on rhetoric in their own work, has restored to English verse the *possibility* of a richness it seemed to have lost. Their disciples may not have been numerous; but at least the Sitwell example had put back into people’s heads the idea that verse *might* be decorative and rhetorical and sophisticated. Afterwards, we find English poetry gradually assuming a new vigour and a new luxuriance, reaching out to fresh scenes and subjects and methods: we find, in short, a poetic renaissance. The Sitwells have been only one of the forces which have gone to produce the renaissance; but their share in

it has been generous. And of the three Sitwells Edith, with her courage and her terrific energy, has been the most effective.

A literary movement which begins as a revolt against a convention usually ends by stiffening into a convention of its own. Miss Sitwell has, since 1915, been in the van of a mutinous army (though it is important to note that she is just as ready to lead the way back to an old servitude, to the pastoral formulæ of the seventeenth century or the dream-formulæ of the French symbolists, as to advance to a new 'freedom'). And yet, in her own work, the beginning of authority is visible. I have referred to the part played by caprice in her relation of ideas and images. But when apparently incongruous ideas or images are related, not once but again and again, when dust is repeatedly 'decoy-duck', when waves and waterfalls are persistently 'goat-ish' or 'goat-footed', we are justified in suspecting that caprice is giving way to some kind of a system. And the consistent transfer of adjectives from the domain of one sense to that of another steadily builds up the system. The reader begins to expect dew to 'trill' and grass to 'cackle'; he begins to take it for granted that the fire will be 'furry' and the breeze 'pig-snouted'. He learns to feel at home in a landscape where skies that once were a familiar azure have now grown 'hairy', where trees once 'leafy' or 'shady' are now 'green baize', where the foliage ('verdant' of old) is 'tartan', the rain 'guinea-fowl-plumaged', and the sun a 'blackamoor'. In short, he accepts what is rapidly becoming a convention. It may be argued that Miss Sitwell's diction is too individual to be much imitated, that a convention confined to one poet is scarcely worth the name. But a recent University Prize Poem refers to 'red marocain' lilies, 'satin' tears, a 'blond-haired'



breeze, and a fountain with 'chiffon melodies'. And Miss Sitwell's habit of repeating, not merely epithets and images, but whole passages, reinforces the evidence for a convention. Certain themes recur with regularity.

I was a member of a family  
Whose legend was of hunting—(all the rare  
And unattainable brightness of the air)—  
A race whose fabled skill in falconry  
Was used on the small song-birds and a winged  
And blinded Destiny. . . .

This passage from *Troy Park* (suggested, I fancy, by a sentence of Rimbaud) is found almost word for word in a prose essay published in *The New Age* in 1922; it is echoed in *Bucolic Comedies* and in *The Sleeping Beauty*. It is extended in another passage from *The Sleeping Beauty*:

But country gentlemen who from their birth,  
Like kind red strawberries, root deep in earth  
And sleep as in the grave, dream far beyond  
The sensual aspects of the hairy sky  
That something hides, they have forgotten why!  
And so they wander, aiming with their gun  
At mocking feathered creatures that have learnt  
That movement is but groping into life,—

which is in its turn reproduced in a long prose essay, *Poetry and Criticism* (1925). (A slightly different version of this is prefixed to *Bucolic Comedies*.) The idea of the country gentlemen rooted in their own gardens and groves recurs in *The Sleeping Beauty* and in *Bucolic Comedies*; the idea of a degraded Destiny recurs in 'The Child Who Saw Midas' (in the *Troy Park* volume), in *The Sleeping Beauty*, in the 1922 essay. And many other themes are treated in the

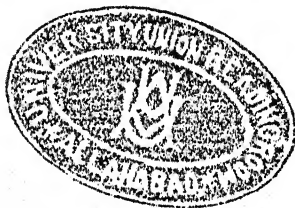


same repetitive way; so that not only a certain diction, but also a certain choice of subject comes to be *expected*. And however few subscribers to Miss Sitwell's convention we may at present see, it is still possible that the new 'poetic diction' may displace the old, and the Romantic tyranny make way for a Sitwellian tyranny.

But it is not merely as the champion of a new diction or the rebel against an effete convention that Miss Sitwell is remarkable. In a way her weakness is her strength, for her inability to escape from Troy Park and the family circle has given her a theme on which she can play innumerable and subtle variations. As a poet of childhood she is supreme. Understanding of the child's view of the world is rarely accompanied by the capacity to transmute such promising material to poetry; as a rule the reader is fobbed off with the sentimental tarradiddles of a Francis Thompson, or a Stevenson. Miss Sitwell has retained a child's romantic imagination while acquiring an adult's power of brilliant and voluptuous expression. The Cassandra of the family, she raves against the forces which threaten Troy Park; but even when that Ilium has been destroyed she can re-create it for us. And so there emerges from her poetry a picture of a life at once remote and familiar: remote, because the reader has left it irrevocably behind him; familiar, because it was once his own. The picture glitters with a hundred colours foreign to the original, since the poet has enriched it from an experience out of the reach of childhood. She had not merely re-created, she has created a lovely fantastic world.

But the Troy Park world is only one of many strange worlds which Miss Sitwell's imagination creates. Her greatest achievement is this metamorphosis of the everyday into the stuff of fantasy; her poetry is a perpetual

challenge to reality. And gradually the reader sees that while Miss Sitwell is busy destroying one kind of Romanticism she is inventing another. She brings to its invention a richness of imagery which we find in the work of few living poets. She brings an impressive rhetoric. She brings a brilliant technique. Above all, she brings the indignation which is the Romantic's reaction to a world from which she is trying to escape. And so she builds up an imposing façade, extravagantly ornamented in a variety of styles. The passer-by gazes with awe at this gorgeous structure. But if he looks behind it he will see that, after all, it is nothing more alarming than the façade of the nursery.



F. TENNYSON JESSE

# DEATH AND DEPORTMENT

## Or GRAVES ANCIENT AND MODERN

The history of life, conscious reasoning life, on this planet, shows us that man has always been exercised with the thought of death. Neither does this seem unreasonable when we reflect that instinctive animal life is also not without its perpetual warnings of death, though free of any conscious reflections on the subject. An animal's instinct bids it fear death; the smell of blood is ominous to a brute beast unless he himself has spilt it for his own sustenance. Mankind, being the head-in-the-sand sort of affair that it is, would ignore the fact of death, were it possible. Now that we have arrived at a certain sophistication, we do, indeed, ignore unpleasant truths as much as we can, especially in England, which is probably the only country left where babies are still found under gooseberry bushes, and adultery has no official existence outside the divorce courts. But death is too unavoidable a fact even for England—even suburban England—to deny. We therefore treat it as is in our tradition, with a reverent gravity, but giving as little notice to it as possible.

We do not want this rather ill-bred obtrusive fact to presume too much on its undoubted inevitability. Like the Income Tax, we try to cheat it as long as possible, and when we are caught at last we bow the head and say, 'Let all things be done decently and in order, but do not let us have any unpleasant publicity'.

How differently does the other great English-speaking race deal with this matter! The Latins, we know, love

pomp and circumstance in matters funereal—is not *pompes funèbres* a French expression?—but they are as nothing compared with the North Americans. In fact, no nation since ancient Egypt has competed with them. The oldest and the youngest of the civilizations have met together, and this life and the next have kissed each other.

It has always been the tendency of the primitive races to think of the spirit world as an exact replica, a projection into space, as it were, of this one. The Egyptians were really not at all an idealistic people, in spite of the popular theory to the contrary. Although their religion was complex and ritualistic, the practical side of it merely resolved itself into a hard domination by the priests, and the spiritual side was, as with most religions, merely a palimpsest of successive tribal magics. The instinct of savage races has always been to associate dark powers with the dead, and fear, rather than love, inspired the Egyptians in the creation of their marvellous tombs. Even the laying of the corpses within a series of heavy coffins, fitting one into another like Chinese nest-boxes, was rather to prevent the dead man getting out and making himself unpleasant than to do him honour.

Egyptian funeral art is intensely beautiful because the Egyptians were, perhaps, the greatest artists the world has ever seen, but its inspiration was entirely practical. It is true that there was in the Egyptian mind a close relationship between the mummification of the body and the continued existence of the soul which has been set free. In Egypt the cult of the dead and the cult of stone were one, for the idea of permanence in the dwellings of the dead was but a corollary of the idea of the continued *material* existence of the soul. Not only were real food and wine placed in the tombs, but pictured representations

were made upon the walls, for real food and wine would perish, but pictures remained. Ancient Egypt, in fact, looked on the spirit world as a shadow or reflection of things known. Like Professor Eddington's analogy of the two tables with which he begins his book, *The Nature of the Physical World*, to the ancient Egyptians the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh were co-existent. Christianity merely reversed the Egyptian idea by making this world the shadow, and the spirit world the reality.

It is one of man's most ardent and pathetic hopes that there is continuity of individual life, and the higher religions have always taught that the soul goes on to finer and less material things. This was not the idea of the ancient Egyptians: to them the needs of the disembodied soul were the same as those it had known in life, and their whole anxiety was to provide it with the simulacrum of these things.

Modern America has a religion which, like that of ancient Egypt, is a palimpsest of tribal magics—mostly those of European tribes. Modern America also tries to propitiate its dead—or can it be that, less worthy still, it is trying by its treatment of the dead to propitiate the living?

I have lying before me a publication which, for the beautiful gloss of its paper, and the finish and expensiveness of its process blocks, is unapproached in England, where, nevertheless, we produce luxury papers extremely well. This publication is called by the homely, not to say pleasant, name of *The Casket and Sunnyside*.

A charming title. When I first read it I thought of some super house-agent's journal, telling of ideal homes nestling in green pastures. The sub-title, however, was something of a disillusionment. It ran as follows: 'Devoted to the best interests of funeral directors, embalmers.



sanitarians, and manufacturers of Funeral Supplies.' *The Casket and Sunnyside*, in short, is the journal of the Morticians of America. You are not an undertaker in America: you are a mortician or funeral director. You do not keep an undertaker's shop, you live above a funeral parlour. Grisly phrase, with what it conjures up of corpses meeting together in the night-time over cups of ghostly tea. . . .

And *The Casket and Sunnyside* is the publication issued for, and read twice every month, in these parlours, by the funeral director and all the budding little funeral directors who indulge in their childish sports in one of the many 'Funeral Homes with garage. Upper floor used for living apartment, with eight rooms and bath. Lower floor used entirely for the business', which one can see advertised in any of the issues.

This publication so well, indeed, understands the family life of the funeral parlours, that it even provides in each issue a crossword puzzle, in which the words mostly mean something in the business. You read, for instance, a clue saying 'A branch of the external carotid artery running along the side of the face and nose', and your young hopeful pipes up: 'I know that one, Poppa: Facial!' Or to the rather grisly clue, 'Deadly—as a wound', little Mamie can answer brightly, 'Mortal!'—while Willy, without speaking, but with a silent concentration that will one day make him a leading corpse-light in the profession, will reply to 'A poisonous compound prohibited as an ingredient of embalming fluids in many states' with the pencilling of the dire word 'Arsenic'. Thus, in the Living Rooms of the Funeral Homes of America, is the young idea taught without tears the rudiments of the mortician's profession.

What scope this would have given to Mr. Squeers!



Instead of 'C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, winder, a casement. When a boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it', he could have said: 'F-o-r-m-a-l-d-e-h-y-d-e, formaldehyde, go and inject some into the axillary artery', and there would have been much of his job done for him. Not all, for it is a very complicated business getting ready for burial in America, almost as complicated as it was in the days of the Pharaohs.

A curious phase of thought called Christianity has intervened between the two, and has been thought by some of us to teach that the soul is what matters, and that the body of this death is of no account, but *The Casket and Sunnyside* knows better. There is money in corpses.

Listen to these extracts from a brightly written article teaching a young casketsalesman how to set about his work.

'A customer [I quote from *The Casket and Sunnyside*] may come into your establishment with his mind made up to purchase a casket of the same design that was used for his mother, who passed away ten or twelve years before. You can say to him, "I realise the sentiment connected with wanting to use the same design of casket as your mother had, but there have been many improvements in caskets since burying her, and I believe you will be interested in looking them over. I am sure you will be better pleased, too, because these are better values at their price and are very, very much richer in appearance." Your customer, however, may not see it just that way: he may have in mind the purchase of a lower grade of casket. It then becomes your duty as a salesman to interest him in the higher grade of purchase.

'We will assume that he is one of the leading business men in your community, and that his wife has just died.

You know he drives a high-priced automobile, is active in the country club, holds membership in several lodges, and enjoys all the luxuries of life. The first thing to do is to ease the mind of your patron, let him realise that nothing is going to be forced on him . . . this establishes confidence in his mind. You stop in front of a bronze casket, and say, "Here is a casket, Mr. Nelson, which is the very best to be had in funeral furnishings. It is an investment in satisfaction. I have other grades of caskets, of course, which sell for less, but they don't reproduce the *value* that is shown here. A purchase of this kind is an investment that will pay dividends to you all the rest of your life in the satisfaction that will exist in your mind when you think of the last thing you were able to do for Mrs. Nelson. This purchase is the last one you will ever be able to make for her, and I am sure you want it to be just as fine as if she were still with you."

'Perhaps Mr. Nelson will agree that he wants to do the very best he can for his wife. He has seen your bronze casket, he has felt it; perhaps he has tapped the metal, felt the sensation of its strength and solidity; he has seen the richness of its linings, and the beauty of its handles make an appeal; he is *interested* in it; he wants to know the *price*; when you tell him his breath is taken away for the moment. But Mr. Nelson can readily afford to buy the bronze casket, it is for men in his circumstances that these caskets are made. A funeral is investment in satisfaction. Mr. Nelson is at a point now where his *desire is awakened*. (!)<sup>1</sup> He has the money to buy, but his taste has not been educated to such figures as apply to the cost of a funeral.

"This bronze casket," you explain, "is the very top-notch of quality in funeral furnishings. It will pay for

<sup>1</sup> Exclamation mark mine.—F. T. J.

itself over and over in the solace and satisfaction that will ever be associated with your memory of your wife. I would assume that you are a man of about forty-five years of age, Mr. Nelson. You may reasonably expect to live until you are at least seventy-five. Your investment in this bronze casket will pay you dividends for the next thirty years, in the pride that will come to you whenever you reflect upon the last service you were able to render Mrs. Nelson. I do not sell these caskets very often: only people who have means can afford to buy them. More and more people are making their funeral purchases in harmony with the standards that they maintain in the purchase of goods for the living."

"The customer may still be hesitating. Perhaps he may ask you to show him something less costly. "Yes," you reply, "that I shall be glad to. Here is a casket which is a close second. It is not so good, of course, as the other one, but it will serve the same purpose."

"Perhaps the customer will now say: "What would you do, were you in my place?"

"You answer, "I would select the high-grade bronze. When your wife was living, you thought enough of her to buy her a beautiful Pierce-Arrow car. You could have bought her a lower-priced car that would have given just as high service, but you bought the high-priced one because of the comfort and satisfaction it would bring to you both in its ownership. The purchasing standard for the dead should be the same as for the living." "

What could be closer to the ideals of ancient Egypt? Just consider this salesman's remarks: '*A funeral is an investment in satisfaction.*' '*More and more people are making their funeral purchases in harmony with the standards that they maintain in the purchase of goods for the living.*'

Odd as it may appear, Mr. Nelson does not kick the young salesman into one of his own coffins: he meekly and thankfully buys the most expensive, and the young salesman is free to mop his brow and eat his well-earned quick lunch.

His is, after all, the comparatively easy side of the business. The embalmer is the man who has the real problem to face. We read, for instance, in the column headed (rather grimly) 'The Question Box', of worried correspondents who wish to know why a corpse has been so disobliging as to get covered with blue spots, so that they have had to work hard with pink cream and face-powder to get a decent appearance. Powder, rouge, and cream, indeed, play as large a part in this toilet of the dead of both sexes as they do in that of a living woman, or of a Hermaphrodite. It is, therefore, obvious that the quality of the materials used is of great importance. Hence we read advertisements such as the following: 'Life-Balm is a harmless velvety cream that imparts to the dead a healthy glow. . . . Life-Balm is different from any other cream on the market, and can be used either separately or in conjunction with your own favourite massage cream.' Life-Balm, we feel, on reading farther, is run rather close by 'O-do-less, the Embalmer's Friend', and choice is further complicated by the Dodge Chemicals, which are described as 'Dreams Come True'.

Dull, indeed, must be the mortician who cannot find all he wants in *The Casket and Sunnyside*. Does he want a Funeral Car, or (as he may, if very refined, prefer to call it) a Casket Coach? He has a wide choice. He reads on one page that 'The Cunningham Equipment will be an evidence of his Prestige', on another that 'The Funeral Car of to-day resembles the finest passenger limousine.'

In the Sayers and Scovill Casket Coach there is nothing to attract the morbidly curious.'

Does he want a casket, that essential of his profession? Even more bewildering is the choice offered to him. There is 'The Appeal of the National Metal Half Couch', which 'gives a restful setting to the body'. He is further told that 'each of these caskets offers real sales possibilities to you'. Then there are the 'Redwood Caskets with set-in bottoms', and the 'Sozonian', whose proud slogan is 'It's in the Zinc'. Or there is the 'unusual line of perfect burial goods' displayed by the Illinois Company, which 'create a sensation of splendour wherever seen'.

Or, if he wishes evidence of thought for the immortal part of man, he can lay in a stock of Egyptian Cast Bronze, the Casket Eternal, secure in the knowledge that 'Sound-thinking people in every community are convinced that permanence is the great outstanding quality to be secured in a casket', and that the Egyptian Cast Bronze not only meets this requirement, but with its lotus blossoms, emblem of mortality, that 'have been made an intimate part of the design', he is also uniting himself 'with thoughts of a strong, forceful character'. His client neatly embalmed, massaged, rouged, and powdered, laid in whatever casket he has chosen, and transported to the graveside in the Funeral Car, our mortician is still well equipped.

Does he want a lowering device? 'The More You Know About Machinery, the Better You'll Like the Frigid'; perhaps an unhappy choice of name. But the words in this particular advertisement are not very well chosen: 'Worm Gear is Indestructible', seems an unfortunate phrasing in this connection.



Is anyone likely to want to pray at the funeral? This rather exotic difficulty is met at once with the cheerful, 'Now, what about a Prayer Rail? Our new No. 700 W.H.C. Prayer Rail Will Never Sag'. Perhaps the relations of your client may want a Luminous Cross? There is the Prismen, which 'burns with an awe-inspiring beautiful red glow on either direct or alternating currents, comforting to the bereaved family and impressive to the mourners'. How pleasing is that little touch differentiating between the family and the mourners!

And, even when the Frigid Lowering apparatus has done its work, there still remains a distinctive note that the inspired mortician can give. He can read about it in a four-page coloured supplement which is included in *The Casket and Sunnyside*. On each page is shown a brilliantly green grave in various stages of 'finish', and on the first page is printed, in heavy lead caption, this enchanting and witty remark: 'YOUR GRAVE TROUBLES NO LONGER GRAVE'.

Naturally, this makes the mortician examine the advertisement more carefully, and he finds the solution of his final problem lies in the fact that the Joseph M. Stern Co. manufacture an artificial grass coverlet, which can be bought by the yard and laid down for all eternity. On it the grass is always of a bright veridian, and its enthusiastic inventors say of it that 'IT MAKES THE BURIAL AN INTERMENT', which to many of us may seem a distinction without a difference.

Should our mortician not be at the head of a business, but want to take a position, he can answer any of the 'ads.' in the 'Help Wanted' column. He can assure the advertiser that he is that person required 'who must be big enough and broad enough to see the trend ahead, and



get in line for the march of progress'. Or he can apply to be one of the 'three live hustling men wanted to sell Frigid Fluids'.

It will be seen that our mortician finds all his problems solved for him in the advertisement and advice columns of *The Casket and Sunnyside*, but he finds more than that. His social life and his desire for intellectual knowledge are also catered for. He can read that Mr. Muck, of the Ever-Ever Casket Company, and Mrs. Muck have returned after spending the summer at their delightful cottage at Iverhuron Beach; and that Mr. and Mrs. Gates of Toronto, with their son Earl, the youngest person ever to pass the Canadian Embalmers' Examination, and their daughter Ethel, have recently left for an extended trip to the Pacific Coast. He can read a paragraph headed, 'Says Death Preparedness Grows', and can find out that it is no less a person than the President of the National Selected Morticians who is responsible for this statement. The mortality figures for Maine are presented to him in another paragraph, and there is 'a snappy par' about an elaborate casket for a pet cat.

On one and the same page he can read, 'Poems of Grief and Consolation', and a sprightly-headed column, 'The Funny Side', which has little anecdotes about death and bereavement which are sure to cheer him up on a wet day in his Funeral Home.

Life is not all death, even for a funeral director: it holds things such as 'A Good Old-Fashioned Clam Bake', with 'multitudes of clams, sweetcorn, chicken and lobster, not forgetting quantities of soft drinks'. Such an entertainment is quite frequent when the morticians of a State get together. It is a touching and a lovely picture, all the funeral directors throwing care to the winds, running

through the woods, a clam in one hand and a glass of lemonade in the other, singing together for very lightness of heart.

And, were we privileged to be present both at the work and the play of such funeral directors as I have presented, would it not be an inspiring thought that it is to ancient Egypt that we owe these modern activities?

For what, after all, is at the root of this traffic with death in ancient Egypt and modern America? Is it not the savage's fear of the unknown? Propitiation of the dead themselves in ancient Egypt, of the critical living in modern America. The food, the drink, the handmaids and slaves, the feasting and dancing pictured on the walls, the objects of great beauty and value built up in the sealed Egyptian tombs, these things were to placate the departed soul. For all primitive religions have held that the dead had power to harm, and hence must be propitiated. We of the modern world know that the living have power to harm in a thousand mean little ways, by suggestions of stinginess, of poverty, of undue relief, not to say gladness. . . . And perhaps, also, even with the moderns there is a certain uneasy notion that we did not do all we might have done in life for him who has been taken away from us, that we had better try to make it up somehow, that if there is anything beyond, we had better be on the safe side. . . . Who can say? The heart of that strange animal so humorously called *Homo sapiens* is a mystery, even to himself.

Egypt, the first of the civilizations, America, the latest—both with the savage's fear at the heart. It may be permitted to give the tribute of a regretful and an envious sigh to the clear and calm simplicities of the Elizabethans. There are still those of us to whom the gorgeous caskets

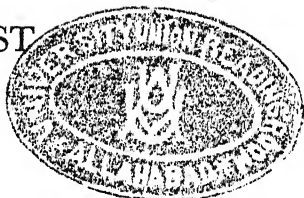
and the embalming fluids of Egypt and America seem oddly unsatisfying beside Walter Raleigh's thoughts on death before his execution:

Even such is Time, that takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,  
And pays us but with earth and dust;  
Who in the dark and silent grave,  
When we have wander'd all our ways,  
Shuts up the story of our days;  
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,  
My God shall raise me up, I trust.

To anyone who can believe those lines, even as to him who was privileged to write them, the trappings of death seem a small affair, and Mr. Nelson and his preoccupations look—can it be?—almost foolish.

EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST

## 'LITERATURE'



'... unless one rejects every metaphor that occurs to one and attempts instead to find a purer form of expression for the object. It is already bad enough that everything—everything—should have been given a name, that no object of human sight but instantly evokes a word trailing clouds of complex and bewildering association: so that no one is able to see a thing as it really is in itself—its quidditas. All this is bad enough. But it is worse still that we should have acquired the habit of almost instinctive metaphor (applied in and out of season), whereby we further complicate our vision and make it finally impossible for ourselves to *see* anything at all. Similes are already less tactless—less false—because, instead of flatly substituting something else for the object seen, they attempt to build up a parallel image which, without stamping out the object itself (which is, after all, the important thing), shall provide a sort of test or touchstone, so that the two passages make for mutual illumination. The metaphor is static, immovably clamped over something essentially in movement; whereas a simile, by reason of its extension and elaboration, always has a movement which may be timed to that of the passage as a whole. The only way out of the difficulty—that of preventing Literature from becoming "Literature"—seems to be Rimbaud's method of synchronizing the metaphor and the object into a single image——'

At this moment of my thoughts that hateful guide came up to me and asked if I had lost anything. 'Nothing,

thank you,' I said, and hurried away from the opening of the cave, down the road.

It was in the deepest part of the Karst, that amazing limestone country into which the mildly rolling landscape of Moravia so suddenly sinks. The gorge is quite shallow at the point where the road enters it; as we proceeded, the road did not appear to descend, but the perpendicular grey rocks rose higher and higher until the tops became entirely obscure, fading into a complicated texture of dull daylight and the confused leafage of ash and birch. The openings of caves of all sizes and shapes were obvious on both sides of the road, as we drove slowly along, manœuvring round bend after bend. These, I thought, must be the homes of those curious, livid cave-pigeons of which I had heard. The hunters hang white rags inside the caves; these are then flapped in a particular way and the pigeons, frightened, fly out in a bunch into immediate range of the guns. A beautifully ordered death, as the poet Rilke describes it in one of his incomparable sonnets; 'killing is a figure of our wandering sorrow', he goes on to explain. Certainly here is a happening which can be contemplated for its own sake and assimilated as a pure figure of thought; no metaphors are necessary, even if any be possible, to point its beauty and strangeness. Farther down the road, however, an orgy of metaphor—of 'Literature'—awaited me.

The great cave of Macocha, when I eventually reached it, presented an unimpressive opening, very low and unobtrusive—almost, one would have thought, impassable. But the guide (a Czech) was on the look-out for visitors, and had very soon put me into a boat and started to propel us both down the wide, low opening on the clear still water which, he told me, filled most of the cave. He



spoke in German; but I had almost as lief he had spoken in Czech, since his accent was so vile that I had much difficulty in understanding what he said. After he had been talking for a few minutes, however, I began to wish that I could not understand at all. For what he was saying consisted in an explanation, and the rock passage we were so smoothly traversing needed no explanation whatever. It opened out now and then into conical chambers of dusky wet stone, out of which the livid limestone formations proceeded in numberless slow shapes, coloured, some of them, only a shade or two paler than the parent rock itself. As yet there was nothing very surprising, only the discreet beauty of an endless life so gradual that it seemed to me it must stretch outwards from a centre, rather than move in one single direction.

But the guide thought otherwise. 'Look up to the right, please, sir, and you will see the Shawl. It is lighted from behind, this stalactite, so that you may see the folds. A little farther up is the Elephant's Ear, a similar formation. Look now, if you please, into that pool of water up on the ledge: in it you see reflected a complete village—the church, the cottages, the pump.' Then, suddenly changing from the horrible sing-song tone in which he had spoken the rest: 'The water here is nine metres deep.' This fact, not in itself of much interest, was yet absurdly welcome to me, after the mechanical rigmarole to which I had been forced to lend ear: it was (I suppose) true, at any rate it was clear.

The boat glided on, from gloom into light, and back again into gloom, revealing shape after incredible shape of glistening wet stone above and all round us in the extreme silence. Then the guide began again, describing, telling me what to look at, what to see; each metaphor





seamy and drawn from top to bottom, intensely clutched by the roots of its existence. I looked at it, trying to make myself part of it, for its secret. Its weight and mass were great, it would be a consideration over against any observer; what influence it might eventually exert over the sensitive mind (some sort of influence seemed implicit in the stress of its shape) I had no time even to conjecture. Beside it hung a heavy folded point, rooted in the dark invisible rock above. Below, a roughly pointed mound urged upwards. There was a peculiar silence and extreme void between those two stretching points: I felt the ordinary air to be opacity itself in comparison with that between the stalagmite and stalactite. This tautness was repeating itself in varying intensities all round me; the rigidity of the incredibly slim forms hanging under a neighbouring rock-passage seemed to carry very little of this invisible thrust.

Again the guide claimed my attention, in order to give his account of the scene. I cannot remember the whole orgy of metaphor in which he now indulged: all I recall is a peculiarly vicious sentence about the joined pillar, comparing it—with an inevitability excruciatingly foreseen—to a monument. *So wie Denkmal*: the German expression seemed to make it somehow worse—flat and heavily purposive. Few objects of domestic use and familiarity but were, according to the guide, exemplified here in this cavern; and he proceeded to enumerate them.

But there comes a point at which pain ceases to be felt. At the sight of one particular little stalagmite growing out of a crevice in the wall and duly annihilated as 'The Child's Hand', my mind mercifully closed against its tormentor. For the growth in question was of a strange, tiny, sinister beauty, which made that of the others seem

almost obvious. It was true, alas! that in its form—a flat-tish surface with two points growing up out of it—there was something that could be forced, by a really determined mind, into similarity to a small hand. But—and here is the crux of the matter—to constate this likeness was to lose all interest in the *thing itself*. What had been substituted was a child's hand, and I had not come to so out-of-the-way a place as Macocha to see a mere hand. To find it stupefying that Nature should imitate, very clumsily, a human limb in limestone, when sculptors do the thing so much more convincingly, is mere stupid goggling: it shows a lack of perception of Nature's purpose and powers astonishing in creatures who are daily exposed, in a very practical sense, to her more distressing vagaries. And since she never ceases to make hands in flesh, there is surely nothing so very surprising in her making, in another material, something that vaguely recalls the same form.

What is wonderful, though, is the actual form—that which makes it *unlike* a hand—into which the material falls, and this was what I felt on seeing that particular stalactite. 'A figure of our wandering sorrow.'

The kind of vision I am recommending, if bravely and consistently followed, makes for sincerity and clarity of thought, because it leaves severely alone what patently does not belong to it; and such a renunciation is, obversely, an act of receiving. Everything contemplated as it is in itself, not as an image, gives a new shape to our thought, instead of merely adding a name already worn out with repetition. All this business of 'Lion' rocks and 'Leaping Stag' trees and 'The Man in the Moon' and 'Orion's Belt'—it is this passion for sticking names on to everything that blunts our senses so fatally and blinds us completely

to the nameless beauty of objects. The evil practice is very thoroughly carried out; so that even works of art which their creators carefully left undescribed have since had names attached to them—the 'Moonlight' Sonata, the 'Spirit' Trio, and so forth—so determined are people not to be led, even for a moment, into loosening their hysterical clutch on the paraphernalia of physical existence.

The word 'significant' must, of course, denote 'significant of' something; but 'significant of itself' is not necessarily a tautology; for the 'itself' here means literally more than meets the eye—at any rate at a first glance. If the second glance produces nothing more helpful than the word 'Lion' or 'Stag' or 'Man', the fault lies in the indolent mind of the regarder, to whom what amounts to a further dimension is always open, if only he be free from mental constipation. We owe a good deal, in this way, to those rather foolish people, the Super-realists, because, by associating in their pictures forms that are usually not seen together, they have done much to liberate the forms themselves from 'literary' entanglements.

But it is not so much the forms of man-made objects that are significant in the above sense. It is rather those free arabesques which it everywhere pleases Nature to form out of material seemingly merely massive and chaotic, or even figured onto the detail of some more defined whole—a leaf, a beetle's wings; for instance, all those fantasies of colour and shape which created the incidents of that astounding Nibelheim I have endeavoured to describe: these are the forms which are most truly significant, in that by their very purity—the solitude and ineffability—of their being, they reveal to us the shapes of music and of thought itself.

MRS. CLEMENT PARSONS

## FORKS

Though dinner is a daily event that may last an hour one seldom sits back and speculates as to how the ritual of the table elaborated itself out of lowly beginnings in caves and other primitive abodes. In Botticelli's *Wedding Feast* (Italian Exhibition, Burlington House, 1930), where at a long table the grave, gracious bride and girl friends face a similar table at which sits a row of urbane gentlemen, dinner is strictly *à la russe*, the two tables being strewn with nothing less ethereal than cherries. The cherries are interspersed with little blackish two-pronged forks 'carelessly' set, to the end that forks and cherries make one of the chintz patterns Botticelli loved. The date of the painting is 1487, and this is as early a representation of forks as an observer of meals in art can recall. Perhaps the earliest fork in the magnificent collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum is a slim brass implement with graceful finial, labelled 'Italian; 16th century'. The blackish forks in Botticelli's conversation piece, looking like ebony, were probably metal, for had even so gentle a lady as Lucretia Pucci tried to spear a cherry with an ebony fork she might have broken the fork or missed the cherry.

It was fitting that Italy, the first land to emerge out of Gothic night into Renaissance refinement, should be a pioneer of forks. Our English Coryat, who in 1608 rambled through France, Switzerland, Northern Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, was as impressed by the Italians' 'little forkes . . . not used in any other country' as by any of the big sights.



'This forked cutting of meate', he commented, 'is used in all places of Italy, their forks being for the most part of yron or steele, and some of silver. The reason of this their curiosity is, because the Italian cannot indure to have his dish touched with fingers, seeing all mens fingers are not alike cleane.' Coryat describes how Italian diners 'with one hand cut the meate out of the dish' with their knife while 'they fasten their forke which they hold in their other hand upon the same dish'. The use of the fork the English traveller recorded was not for the trencher but for steadying the joint. The 'little forkes' were employed as carving-forks.

Coryat, open-minded and receptive (in spite of an unconquerable aversion to grated parmesan) took to forks, and after returning to England carried a fork about with him. For this his curiosity his friend, Laurence Whitaker, 'quipped' him, addressing him across a table by an ignominious name, '*Furcifer*'. But derisive conservatism puts up a poor fight against rationalization and before long other travelled Englishmen and gradually the general polite public adopted forks. Slowly, as regarded silver forks. In *Old Silver in Europe and America* (1928), Mr. E. Alfred Jones states that foreign visitors during Charles II's reign remarked on the absence of silver forks from English meals.

It is a shock to realize that a generation or so earlier than Coryat people as civilized as More, Margaret Roper and Sidney did without forks. Hence the numerousness and high position of napkins in Tudor inventories. Repeated washing in plain or perfumed water was an essential process at forkless feasts and accounts for the semicircular fitted dining-hall basins of faience with gargoyle spouts we see in museums. M. Alfred Franklin



records in *La Vie Privée d'Autrefois* that at Parisian eight-course banquets even as late as 1655 fresh napkins were supplied four times and used not only to wipe the mouth but to clean the spoon and fork and dry the knife before cutting bread.

Though Shakespeare's Italian heroines would have used forks, nowhere in Shakespeare are forks mentioned. Real life Royalties in England used them earlier than other people. Theirs were exquisite forks, parade forks. Great Elizabeth possessed, to our knowledge, three. One was crystal, garnished with gold and sparks of garnets; another was coral, slightly garnished with gold; the third was gold, garnished with two little rubies, two little pearls pendant, and a little coral. The earliest surviving English fork, that also in our incomparable South Kensington store-house, is silver, a flat two-pronged skewer, tapering slightly, bearing the London hallmark of 1632-3 and the crests of John Manners, 8th Earl of Rutland, and his wife. The engraving gives sufficient adornment and the fact that such a frail quotidian object has lasted three centuries and now rests in, one may believe, eternal security is in itself thrilling.

Table implements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were individual possessions, not bought in dozens by the householder, and, as Sir George Sitwell has recently noted in describing a Yorkshire family, the Hurts of Haldworth, 'even in the Royal palaces forks were not laid for guests before 1668'. A fork went about in its owner's pocket, an object to be neatly wiped and resheathed, and the tradition of personal ownership lingers in what Godfathers and Godmothers do for one in one's Baptism, 'knife, fork and 'poon', though in old days a finely wrought knife and fork oftener commemorated a

marriage. To a set of knives up to twelve, complete in case, there might be one fork. Sometimes a knife and fork were made to fold together. Louis XIV granted to his carver in chief the addition to his coat of arms of a knife and fork crossed and the emphasized crossing recalls Browning's monk who brings up against the brother he abhors that

‘Knife and fork he never lays  
Cross-wise . . .  
As I do, in Jesu's praise.’

Louis XV, by the way, was an expert cook of the chafing-dish type and his ‘*adresse*’ in laying open an egg with a single blow of the fork is said to have been a sight to behold.

Since meat, up to the mid-seventeenth century, was usually eaten, as in Leonardo's *Last Supper*, with fingers it need not surprise us that in partaking of soup each person dipped his own spoon into the tureen. Some people, however, are always ahead while others lag behind. The English eighteenth century styled the *gourmand* who was also a *gourmet* ‘a notable fork’, while as near that period as 1695 the Marquis de Coulanges, writing from Paris to Madame de Sévigné, registered disgust when at a very aristocratic dinner Madame de Saint Germain, pressing fish on him and recommending its sauce, dabbed his portion in several places with the sauce, using for this purpose her own spoon ‘qui sortoit toute fraîche de sa belle bouche’. His condemnation included another lady who at the same dinner used, he said, her ten fingers, and them alone, for everything.

Apart from occasional tools such as grape scissors and asparagus tongs, forks were the world's final refinement,

spoons having been in use early enough to be mentioned in *Exodus* and described in *Numbers*. As it is conjectured that shells were the first spoons the shell-like spoons in tea caddies would appear to be lineal descendants from the primal norm.

Futile to imagine that so obvious an aid to eating as a fork was never devised before Coryat came across forks in Italy. No doubt Renaissance forks, like Renaissance science and erudition, were rediscoveries, justifying Mr. Aldous Huxley in his similitude of history to a fried whiting, its tail in its mouth. The earliest fork may have been a long, two-branched utensil, hung near the fire to stir and prod the contents of a stewpan. Ancient church frescoes illustrate pronged forks with which devils thrust souls into hot spots. In Mr. and Mrs. Quennell's *Everyday Life* Series is an illustration of an Anglo-Saxon silver fork and spoon, found in a hoard at Sevington, Wilts., date about 800, the fork a bifurcated spike, its points meeting as in pincers. We know that Piers Gaveston ate pears with a silver fork, and, as Piers Gaveston died in 1312, his period was solidly medieval, even if he himself was a decadent, or, as the contemporary chronicler puts it, nice in his manners. In the British Museum reposes a small spoon (1500?) of which a 'sucket' fork for stabbing such sweets as candied fruit forms the handle end. Recurrence and oblivion of inventions is a fascinating problem of historical study.

Seeing that history, vitally traced, means a record of the progressive victory of tools with brains behind them over hands it is amazing that classic history books scarcely mention so significant an index to social change as the technique of meals. Till J. R. Green set a better fashion historians' custom was to blight interest in things of peace and demand interminable concentration on dim

clashings called the So Many Years' War and the So Many More Years' War, results of which, apart from killing and maiming, were quite often inconclusive. What numbers fell at 'Devalera, Albumina, Salamunda', etc., names of regiments, diagrams of battles, causes of wars (as Jenkins's ear), to make space for these ironic data the stage was blackened where all the while went on the constructive activities of individuals, with their foods, furniture, orchards, household accounts and fireside comfort. To learn that at Navarino 'this bloody and destructive battle was continued with unabated fury for four hours' causes a modern reader no sensation whatever, whereas to find that at about the same date Harriet Martineau, visiting the United States, pleased Americans by adopting their ways, 'eating her egg from a glass and holding her fork in her right hand', excites speculation and sticks in one's memory.

If the forks in the glass cases devoted to forks and their kin in the V. and A. talked, what reports they might give of suave conversation appreciated in the intervals between carrying delicious morsels to distinguished mouths! Handles, there, are of most varied materials. Not counting silver and other customary metals, they include:

<i>Agate</i>	<i>Green stained ivory</i>
<i>Carved ivory</i>	<i>Meissen porcelain</i>
<i>Filigree and enamel</i>	<i>Moustiers earthenware</i>
<i>Gold</i>	<i>Rock crystal</i>
<i>Staghorn</i>	<i>Tortoiseshell</i>
<i>Clear amber over foil</i>	<i>Venetian millefiore glass</i>

All who have legs should further self-education by visiting the courts where these delicate instruments are displayed. For the bedridden and residents in New

Zealand a valuable book of photographs, *Knives and Forks* (Medici Society), with historical introduction, has been provided by Major C. T. P. Bailey.

During June—October, 1930, an Exhibition called *Le Décor de la Table* was held in the Musée Galliera, Paris, where—so it seemed to the writer of this article—the modern forks shown were either completely commonplace or achieved novelty by being inconvenient to manipulate. Flat-pronged dinner forks with square-cornered handles or handles with cleft ends or handles too narrow for the inside of one's hand accompanied knives with pointed tips. The idea was possibly Scandinavian, the effect was rather uncouth. The perfect adaptation of a standardized fork's structure to a fork's work is not lightly to be abandoned. Bowing of prongs enables one to eat without tilting up one's arm; a four-pronged form gives the prongs the spoon value once proper to a knife-blade. Whenever the 8th Earl of Rutland used his beautiful two-pronged Stuart fork, flat like a paper-knife, he risked elbowing a neighbour's ribs, while, confronted with a platter of pease, he had (it must be feared) recourse to fingers. *Autres fourchettes, autre Manners.*

DESMOND MACCARTHY

## THE SKIRMISHERS—II

The November evening, though humid, was so mild and bright that Patrick Bavand, now at last on his way home, was tempted to sit for a while in Kensington Gardens. He soon exhausted the sentiment of the sunset and the interest of his thoughts, which were mostly silly, so presently he fished a book out of his pocket. It was about the size and thinness of a cigarette case. He had snatched it up from Arthur Mordayne's writing-table before leaving the house. It was called *Aphorisms* (there were exactly a hundred of them), and the author was a philosopher whom he admired and had in his youth intermittently endeavoured to understand—F. H. Bradley. 'Yes, yes,' he reflected, 'that was always the drawback to metaphysicians as far as I was concerned; I never had enough intellect to be thoroughly taken in by one of them. And how long I took to find it out!' With *Aphorisms* still unopened in his hands he mused on the difficulty he had once experienced in resisting the purchase of any work which set out to explain the Universe. And now—even a volume entitled *The Riddle of the Sphinx* could not make him fumble for his money. As for Relativity, he was resolved never to attempt to understand *that*—the flounderings and 'I-mean-to-says' of enthusiasts who thought themselves in happy possession of Einstein's theory had made far too painful an impression on him. If they had not enough normal gumption to observe that every word they uttered betrayed the fact that they didn't *know* what they were talking about, that they didn't know *what* they



were talking about, that they didn't know what they were *talking* about, how could he listen to them without contempt? After all, a man who directs you to King's Cross must know what a station is. Strange. People seemed to enjoy creating a fog in their minds: the hazier they became about everything the more pleased they seemed to be. Now he, himself, was not like that: he wanted to be clear—at any rate to be able to guess where the haze began in his own mind. He was ready to believe his notions were inadequate, inaccurate, absurd, but he wanted them to *mean* something while he held them. Mightn't one almost define Philosophy, honest Philosophy, as an attempt to state some view of the universe so clearly that others had a chance to see where it was wrong? Bradley? Hadn't he said something like that in his Introduction to *Appearance and Reality*, which contained such remarkable detached thoughts? 'Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct, but to try to find them is also an instinct.' No, it wasn't quite the same. He had read Bradley's *Ethical Studies* with enormous enthusiasm during his second year at Cambridge, and as long as his friend had remained a Hegelian he had accepted its conclusion that the good was 'self-realisation'. 'The Self?' He had clean forgotten now what 'The Self' was, only that it was something that did not exist, according to Bradley, apart from 'my station and its duties'. But when his friend Mordayne had come out of the Hegelian tunnel, he, too, had changed his views. Of course, if he had been Bradley's friend he wouldn't have changed them. How weak-minded we were, especially in youth—when, too, we really cared most about being right! But in matters in which we were duffers, wasn't it throughout life the only thing to do—to

follow the best, nearest, and most impressive authority? Choose your Popes. That was the one chance of acquiring, at any rate, intelligent opinions on matters with which you were unqualified to deal. But Popes needed watching. Didn't he keep a lynx eye on Arthur now? (Patrick smiled affectionately and slyly to himself.) Think for yourself! What advice to give a young man! All the asses took it, and as a book-reviewer his ears were deafened every week by their brayings. It was just because there was no respect for pundits that our culture was in many respects so lamentably inferior to that of our fathers. No distinction was made by editors between a book which was the labour of years and a conceited botched-up farrago of nonsense on the same subject. Both were turned over to anybody capable of writing a readable column. 'To myself, for instance,' Patrick Bavand said aloud. He sighed and turned to the little book in his hands. Arthur had evidently read it; he had ticked some of the aphorisms. He recognized several from the Preface to *Appearance and Reality* which he would look up when he got home. There were not a few thoughts, too, about love. One of these seemed the model of what an aphorism should be. It summed up an essay in a sentence: 'To be chaste is to have the body in the keeping of the heart. Their divorce is the one thing which in the end makes unchastity.' A little stab of delight at reading something so to the point and making so much palaver about the flesh otiose, brought him to his feet. He hurried to Princes Gate, and swinging himself on to a 'bus he was borne away, still reading the little book. He was bursting with things he wanted to discuss and, blessings of blessings, he had now again some one before whom it was a delight to tumble out his mind. He had a friend.

'You know,' he said as he settled down to supper before the fire, 'I had a whiff from our past this afternoon. I've been reading Bradley's *Aphorisms*. Do you remember when we used to read him? I have never lost my profound admiration, but I've forgotten what he proved. I know the conclusion of *Appearance and Reality* was that Reality was 'Spirit', but for the life of me I can't remember what 'Spirit' is.

'I don't think you ever had a clear idea of it.'

'Well, I sometimes thought I had. That's the worst of metaphysics: they shrivel up like the magic garden in *Parsival*. I should like to get back.'

'I don't think you will by Bradley's gate, and I can't pull you through it. Did you notice that the last item in his *credo* was included among the *Aphorisms*: "To love-unsatisfied the world is a mystery, a mystery which love-satisfied seems to comprehend. The latter is wrong only because it cannot be content without thinking itself right"? It is again made a last word.'

'I did. You know what struck me most about the *Aphorisms* was that they were chiefly the notes of a lover, of a philosopher who had been in love for a very long time, long enough to know a great deal about it. I felt after reading them that I could tell his love story—in essentials.'

'The story's not important—it's what he got out of it.'

'Yes, but to me the story's interesting. Though I don't respect my prying mind I am interested in peering. Put these aphorisms together. Listen, I'll read them.

"To feel too intensely is to play one's part badly. It is possible that, to make love perfectly, one always should more or less make it. . . . If a woman loves you, you are seeking you know not what when you desire that she

should also understand you. . . . It is bad to doubt if one is loved, but it may be worse past all comparison to doubt if one loves. . . . A man's duty to his beloved is to understand her precisely as she desires to be understood. . . . A man may find, when he is in love, that in reality his principles were only other feelings. . . . There are things it is well to abstain from only upon the condition that we cease to desire them. . . . The secret of happiness is to admire without desiring. And that is not happiness. . . . In an intellectual aspirant the safest love is for an imaginary object, and that, perhaps, includes all love without possession. If we are to beget unrealities, we must know how to be happy with clouds. . . . With two, love may be Platonic, but with three this is harder," and "In love, self-control is an affair for two persons. To be sure only of oneself is to be certain of nothing," and lastly, "One was asked, What is Hell, and he answered, It is Heaven—that has come too late".

'Well, if you choose to arrange his aphorisms in an arbitrary order you can make a story, but I object to your fathering any particular story on Bradley. To me the most significant were (Hand me the book.)—well, the one you quoted last and this: "The soul's immutable core—if there is one—can hardly be amiable. And to love anyone for himself in the end becomes unmeaning." And, of course, the famous one from *Appearance and Reality*. But if you are looking for "a story", which I deplore, you ought not to leave out, "One cannot remain in love unless perpetually one falls in love anew", and "Unhappy those who seek to revive the intoxication and who cannot renew the mystery". But it's a poor game.'

'Arthur, I have a confession to make. What you call the famous one, the aphorism about the world being a

mystery which love-satisfied seems to comprehend, means *nothing* to me now—only that if you're happy you don't bother your head about not understanding the Universe. Once it seemed infinitely suggestive.'

'You were young then. You are old now.'

'Yes, but I hadn't lived then and I have now.'

'I don't see that that need have made you any wiser.'

'O come, come. You're not going to revert to that idea which we used to cherish in order to explain away the palpable superiorities of our elders—that only the young understand—*anything!*'

'Well, youth has a better chance of understanding some things, and this may be one of them. The phantom sail . . . the phantom sail . . . the phantom sail. . . .'

'What's the use of going on murmuring "the phantom sail" like that! Listen: I want to argue. Do you want me to believe that you think that young creatures know more about love than, well, than, than. . . .'

'Than *you?*'

'Well, if you like, than me. No: I don't say that they *know* more about it than the old, or that they are more capable of love, but they have a better chance of understanding its value. And so far they may be wiser. Practically, of course, they are duffers—especially at keeping what they have.'

'Why the devil should they have a better chance of understanding its value?'

'Well, they haven't yet got used to doing without it. The old may still assent to the value of what they have learnt to do without, but they can't *feel* its value so much. They discover consolations. They may take *it* as seriously, but not in relation to themselves, which is another way of saying that they really don't value it as intensely.'



'But youth-love is more than half expectation? It's a perpetual glorious sense of something to come, checkered by postponement and disillusion—slight or agonizing.'

'What are you talking about! Does youth *never* know love-satisfied? Seldom, I grant you, but you've forgotten. I grant, too, that their understanding of love comes far more often through anticipation than fulfilment. But supposing the value of experience itself lies in the intuitions of value which it suggests, what does *that* matter?'

'O Essences! O sour grapes! O Santayana! He's a wonder, but he has never convinced me that an egg which only puts me in mind of a fresh one is as good as an egg which *is* fresh.'

'He never said so. He said that sort of egg was all you'd get. Many sages have said the same. Of course, there are philosophers who will tell you that you are sure of your *perfect* egg—indeed, that you are actually eating it now without knowing. Bradley—up to a point—was one of them. He argued, at any rate, that the Absolute was real and Reality spiritual, but he was aware of the paradox of an ethical Optimism based on such a philosophy. Do you remember? "The world is the best of all possible worlds, and *everything* in it is a necessary evil." There was a contemporary of ours at Cambridge—no, he was not a contemporary—one of our most astonishing and splendid seniors, one who had a better right to Bradley's saying that "To love-unsatisfied the world is mystery which love-satisfied seems to understand". Only McTaggart spent his life and his amazing intellectual powers in flying in the face of Bradley's proviso, that love-satisfied must be content "without thinking itself right"; that is to say, without proving that it is rational. McTaggart was not, all honour to him, satisfied to remain a mere mystic.



When one comes to think of it, was there ever such an intellectual *tour de force* as his rehabilitation of Hegel and his interpretation of the Absolute as a *civitas dei*; as a congregation of persons, all more perfectly in love with each other, than except, at rarest moments, any two can possibly be in love, in time and space? Look—just above your head—reach me down that little pamphlet next his *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, in which he afterwards reprinted part of it (leaving out the emotion)—*The Further Determination of the Absolute*. Give it me.'

Patrick Bavand went to the bookcase and sat down again with the pamphlet on his knees. He did not hand it over at once, and was silent.

'Arthur, I have not turned these leaves for nearly thirty years. I remember now; you may be right after all about youth. I begin to remember—what did you call it?—the phantom sail.'

'Yes, hand the pamphlet over. I'll find what I want to show you.'

While turning its leaves Mordayne went on: 'Hegel had convinced McTaggart that reality was spiritual. But McTaggart had no use for a God, or for any Absolute that was not emotionally recognizable as the highest form of spiritual experience known to him. That in his case was love, love between friends. And it dawned on him that Hegel's definition of the Absolute Idea, which was supposed to emerge inevitably from the Dialectic, could be interpreted in those very terms. (I'm sure Hegel himself never dreamt of such a thing!) From that flash of intuition onwards, he spent his whole life in reinterpreting, amending, repairing, and shoring up with new arguments the stages of the Dialectic by which Hegel reached his ultimate definition of the content of Spirit. Listen.

After quoting Hegel's definition of the Absolute Idea—so dry and abstract—McTaggart goes on: "Each part of Spirit must therefore itself be spirit, and expresses (at present, of course, only implicitly) its full nature. And Spirit is thus made up of spirits—to use a common expression—each part of the whole, but each at the same time a perfect individual, because it expresses the whole nature of Spirit. In other words, the Absolute realises itself in a community of individuals like ourselves—in what has been termed the *Civitas Dei*."

'These finite beings are existing in a state of perfected knowledge and volition, and of that love is the necessary consequence. I'll quote again: "What is the concrete and material content of such a life as this? What does it come to? I believe it means one thing, and one thing only—love. When I have explained that I do not mean benevolence, even in its most impassioned form, not even the feeling of St. Francis, I shall have cut off the one probable explanation of my meaning. When I add that I do not mean the love of Truth, or Virtue, or Beauty, or any other word that can be found in the dictionary, I shall have made confusion worse confounded. When I continue by saying that I mean passionate, all-absorbing, all-consuming love, I shall have become scandalous. And when I wind up by saying that I do not mean sexual desire, I shall be condemned as hopelessly morbid—the sin against the Holy Ghost of Ascalon.

"For, let us consider. We should find ourselves in a world composed of nothing but individuals like ourselves. With these individuals we should have been brought into the closest of all relations, we should see them, each of them, to be rational and righteous. And we should know that in and through these individuals our own highest

aims and ends were realised. What else does it come to? To know another person thoroughly, to know that he conforms to one's highest standards, to feel that through him the end of one's own life is realised—is this anything but love?"

'Ah me, ah me! And it all *still* rests on the Hegelian Dialectic?'

'On McTaggart's, yes. There mustn't be one shaky pillar or the whole thing tumbles into the inane.'

'Arthur, when in those days we knew each other intimately (I don't mean only you and me), and "our highest aims and ends" seemed, at any rate *almost*, realised in each other, it was a joy to feel—wasn't it?—that in some mysterious way we were living in Reality? . . . I'm rather glad, aren't you, that our generation heard of Freud rather late in life.'

## READERS' REPORTS

*Fly Fishing*, by Viscount Grey of Fallodon. (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. 10s. 6d.) When, in 1899, Sir Edward Grey published his book on Fly Fishing for Lord Granby's Haddon Hall Library, he did for the delicate art of the Dry Fly what Nimrod's *Quarterly Review* article did for Hunting, what Scrope did for Salmon Fishing—he brought it into English Literature. Angling generally had been glorified long before by Izaak Walton, English trout-fishing in particular by Froude and Kingsley, but the Dry Fly, though it had been discussed in print (Sir Edward himself had written on it in the *New Review*) had not been treated seriously in a book by a good fisherman who could also write good English. Hence chiefly, I think (though all Fly Fishing is the subject), its immediate success—it went through three editions in two years. Hence the present re-issue, unaltered, and for a sad reason, in spite of all the technical developments of the last thirty years, except for two new chapters. All good fishermen, I suppose, whether fishers of trout or of salmon, wet-fly or dry-fly, have read every word of it; and they will read the last two chapters full of sympathy with Lord Grey—alas! his sight so failed after the war that dry-fly fishing was impossible—and with admiration for the courage which makes so little of the affliction. But it is not only to the fisherman that the book appeals: it is its charm that it describes for the town-worker, whether fisherman or not, in plain, simple, unaffected prose, exactly what he feels, however good a Londoner, when the year comes to May or early June. Who that is lucky enough to have the chances has not hugged to himself

the thought of the Hampshire water-meadows in June, 'borne about' through the week's work 'like a happy secret'? And who has not admired the counsel of perfection, seriously given, that it is best 'to live within a walk of Waterloo' (where the trains start for Hampshire) in order to cross the river in the early sun of May? The impression left on him, says Lord Grey after reading *Fly Fishing* again, is that it is a happy book. So be it. It has certainly made many people happy.

Mr. Lucas, as readers of *Life and Letters* know very well, has a style. And that style has a quality which is far from common. His epigrams and similes and sallies are not, like those of many writers, mere gay butterflies that flit over the serious field of his subject-matter, they are crystals that form about his soundest judgements, and each contains at least a speck of hard-won truth. Consequently, when he is most brilliant and amusing he is most reliable, and we are best instructed when we are enchanted most.

In *Eight Victorian Poets*, Mr. Lucas seems to me a little less amusing than usual. He writes appreciatively and impressively about Tennyson's descriptive poetry; his sketch of William Morris is delightful, and full of a feeling for Morris's poems which is nowadays rare. On Hardy he is presumably good, but no judgement on the matter should be expressed by anyone who has a lurking suspicion that people who like Hardy's pessimism think they like Hardy's poetry—because there is a P in both.

Mr. Lucas is entertaining and fresh when he writes about Clough, and moving when he writes about Rossetti—who is after his own heart; about Browning he says many good things. But his sketch of Swinburne seems



to me inadequate, even when one remembers that most of these papers were written for talks on the wireless. A portrait of Swinburne is unjustly incomplete which leaves out of account his keen critical power, and that delicate sense of moral values which makes his judgments of literature so subtle and convincing; and which, however surprising in the author of *Les Noyades*, does nevertheless pervade his creative as well as his critical work.

On either side of Philosophy stands Melancholy; there is a Philosophy that is begotten of Melancholy, and a Philosophy that begets it. Mr. Lucas understands best the former kind, which is spontaneously generated in some imaginative minds by the idea of a worm and a corpse. It is the philosophy of the poets Mr. Lucas has written about so brilliantly—of Webster, and Beddoes, of Rossetti in some moods, and of Housman. It is not the philosophy of the great Victorians.

Mr. Lucas feels the struggle for faith to be futile, and a little childish, and a regrettable waste of energy. But whether it is or no, the Victorians expended most of their energy upon it, and if—as often—it produced Melancholy in them by the way—well, it was only by the way.

To philosophize, and moralize, and preach—if you take these things from the Victorians, you take away their mainspring, and an essential part of their personality. Though Mr. Lucas writes sympathetically of Arnold's battles with himself, he sees in him a poet struggling with a preacher; and in Tennyson, here agreeing with Mr. Nicholson, he finds a poet of nature who 'wasted himself only too much in criticism of life'. One may not like the ethics of the *Idylls* and all the dogmatism of *Essays in Criticism*, but what is *In Memoriam* (which, however, Mr. Lucas admires) except melancholy description,



without the aching questioning exhorting mind that throbs through it? Or what is Arnold but a Forsaken Merman, without his sense of the heroic soul which 'mounts, and that hardly, to Eternal Life'? And how are we to separate the preacher from the poet in that magnificent chorus beginning 'O frivolous mind of man'?

Mr. Lucas is always a great pleasure to read; but one feels he might have done still better for the Victorians if he could have extended his already wide sympathies to include even the faiths and moral philosophies of the age.

*Two Witnesses: A Personal Recollection of Hubert Parry and Friedrich von Hugel, by Gwendolen Greene. (Dent. 7s. 6d.)* 'The first thing in my life that I can remember is throwing my boot at my nurse'—such is the promising opening of Mrs. Plunket Greene's new book. We must, however, in fairness, warn the amateur of the *genre* that, in spite of small pretty memories (vignettes, by which a text illustrates itself without an engraver), in spite of an amusing company of real people (members of the 'Souls', two yellow china cats, and 'the humours and characteristics' of an unforgettable windmill), this is not primarily a book of entertaining memoirs. Here, woven out of the book's very fabric, as, in distinction to a plot, a pattern ought to be, and no more to be separated from it than the warp is from the woof, unquestionably there is a pattern. It cannot, naturally, be shown without transcribing the whole book; but there is a line of Claudel's that perhaps gives one a glimpse of it:

L'odeur de l'encens se mêle à celle des fleurs et des foins.

As to the smell of flowers and hay-fields, and many other

things of good odour (things of the spirit as well as of the earth), it certainly pervades the opening chapters, those that describe the years of which Mrs. Greene says, 'my father's spirit was as a flying wind, blowing over these early days, filling them with warmth and glow, and an actual delight'. They are, perhaps, the most charming in the book—indeed, the vision is so fresh and direct, the style so pure, and such a delicate spirit of lyricism sleeps, very lightly, in every word, that it almost seems as if Miranda had collaborated with Ariel to write the life of Prospero. But incense? Though she rather liked the whiffs of it she got as a child in the private chapel where Lady Herbert of Lea 'practised her strange Roman Catholic rites', nevertheless, as she grew older she came to hate the Roman Catholic Church as an institution inimical to liberty, and truth, and the beauty that springs where the winds of heaven and the spirit of man blow free and untrammelled—to all the things, in short, that she had learned from the first witness to reverence and love. Then, under the guidance of the second witness, she came to see that these things have an objective reality outside the mind of man, that they are 'our clues to God, and their eternal life is our testament of hope'; and, finally, she realized that, before it can be distilled into the perfect and acceptable savour, the scent of flowers must be mixed with that of incense. Such, if not the pattern, is, at any rate, the story. Many readers, of course, will not agree with the moral; but let them read it all the same, because of the scent of flowers—the scent of flowers, and the sense of the beauty and mystery of life.

Mr. Kitchin's new novel, *The Sensitive One?* (Hogarth Press. 6s.) is a careful, delicate, matter-of-fact description of a

large middle-class family, held together and crushed by a monstrous old patriarch at the top, who is stone deaf and has to be scribbled to on a slate. There is one rebellious son who, in a moment of exasperation, hits the old invalid with a paper knife, and he falls on the fender and dies. The character which gives the name to the novel, namely, the daughter who looks after him, and incidentally her neurasthenic sister, is a first-rate study. It is a pitiful and yet sardonic study in the oppressively matter-of-fact, but not at all an oppressive book to those who use their understanding.

And here's another novel, *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* (Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.), by John Hampson, which shows genuine talent, most straightforward, terse in style. The young author seemed to oscillate between the fantastically fanciful and determinedly grim. This piece of work is grey, grim, and honourable. It is the story of a feckless publican, his decent wife and her brother, a passionate, practical, concentrated youth. It is quite short, but you have been through a good deal by the time you have finished it, and in the company of a man who has an eye for what is squalidly unfeeling and malignant in low-life character, and also for that admirable decency in human nature which survives grinding tests. It is a good piece of work.

*The Nice Old Man and the Pretty Girl: and Other Stories*, by Italo Svevo. (The Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.) This volume contains one rather long short story, one really short, a fable, and the beginning of a sequel to the Confessions of Zeno—a sequel cut short by the author's death. In all except the fable, old age is the theme. The Nice Old Man picks

up a pretty tram-driver, but there ensues a heart attack of a more literal kind, by which his erotism is transformed into a great moral work on the relations between the old and the young. This story is unrevised, and suffers from it; but it is amazing in its acuteness and ironic humour. With the next story, 'Generous Wine', it contains, perhaps, the most convincing dreams in literature. In the unfinished novel, *Zeno*, at seventy, looks back upon the past. Not the design merely, but the reflections and the 'metaphors' hark back to Proust; yet the comparison cannot be taken far. Proust is poetical, remote from life: Svevo on the same theme is unpoetical, incisive, bare; never unconscious of the present, turning on it and on himself the searchlight of a lively and relentless irony. Everyone with a genuine feeling for the novel should buy this book.

*Mackerel Sky*, by Helen Ashton. (Gollancz. 7s. 6d.) Gilbert and Elizabeth had been married five years. He was a highbrow novelist; she worked in a shop. They were hard up—though it is difficult to see how they contrived it on the income and expenditure ascribed to them. But still, hard up they were; they were also irritable. Gilbert was selfish and exasperating; Elizabeth nagged; both lost their tempers—in short, a typical menage. Then Elizabeth found herself with child. The discovery was a blow to both: to Elizabeth it was a disaster. She saw herself condemned, perhaps for ever, to the domestic existence she abhorred. In the meantime she went on desperately with her usual work; her strength and nerves became exhausted; her temper grew worse. Gilbert was dangling after a golden-haired siren in the flat above. At length he and his wife had a terrific scene, and he left her for ever.

But he came back a couple of days later, and they made it up. That is the whole story, but it never flags. The minor characters are not interesting, but the domestic situation and the skilful handling carry one through. And Elizabeth is extraordinarily convincing.

*The Bainbridge Murder*, by Cortland Fitzmaurice (*Eyre & Spottiswoode. 5s.*), announces itself as the work of a Bridge Expert. If Mr. Fitzmaurice's bridge corresponds in any way to his authorship, he must put a strain on the patience of his fellow-players, for I have seldom seen a story which moved with such majestic slowness. I have played bridge with people who brought out cards as Mr. Fitzmaurice brings out clues—impressively, after much thought and murmuring of 'ten, queen, king' to themselves; but I do not wish to do it often. Otherwise, this is not a bad quiet American story. Mr. and Mrs. Edrington's new book, *Murder to Music* (*Collins. Crime Club. 7s. 6d.*), is a disappointment after their last. The Hollywood characters are still there, and quite good, but they have not been added to or improved in any way. And the plot is too absurd; it tries to be gruesome, and to imitate Edgar Allan Poe, and only succeeds in being silly. Poe is *not* a good model for detective novelists.





# LIFE AND LETTERS

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LYTTON STRACHEY



## MADAME DE LIEVEN

Aristocrats (no doubt) still exist; but they are shorn beings, for whom the wind is not tempered—powerless, out of place, and slightly ridiculous. For about a hundred years it has been so. The stages in the history of nobility may be reckoned by the different barricades it has put up to keep off the common multitude. The feudal lord used armour to separate him from the rest of the world; then, as civilization grew, it was found that a wig did almost as well; and there was a curious transition period (*temp.* Marlborough) when armour and wigs were worn at the same time. After that, armour vanished, and wigs were left, to rule splendidly through the eighteenth century, until the French Revolution. A fearful moment! Wigs went. Nevertheless the citadel still held out, for another barrier remained—the barrier of manners; and for a generation it was just possible to be an aristocrat on manners alone. Then, at last, about 1830, manners themselves crumbled, undermined by the insidious permeation of a new—a middle-class—behaviour; and all was over. Madame de Lieven was one of the supreme examples of the final period. Her manners were of the genuinely terrific kind. Surrounded by them, isolated as with an



aseptic spray, she swept on triumphantly, to survive untouched—so it seemed—amid an atmosphere alive with the microbes of bourgeois disintegration. So it seemed—for, in fact, something strange eventually happened. In her case, aristocracy, like some viscous fluid flowing along, when it came to the precipice did not plunge over the edge, but—such was its strength, its inherent force of concentration—moved, as it had always moved, straight onward, until it stuck out, an amazing semi-solid projection, over the abyss. Only at long last was there a melting; the laws of nature asserted themselves; and the inevitable, the deplorable, collapse ensued.

Born in 1785, a Russian and a Benckendorf, Madame de Lieven was by blood more than half German, for her mother had come from Würtemberg and her father's family was of Prussian origin. From the first moment of her existence she was in the highest sphere. Her mother had been the favourite companion of the Empress Marie, wife of Paul I, and on her death the Empress had adopted the young Benckendorfs and brought them up under her own care. At the age of fifteen, Dorothea was taken from a convent and married to the young Count de Lieven (or, more correctly, Count Lieven without the 'particule'; but it would be pedantry to insist upon an accuracy unknown to contemporaries), whose family was no less closely connected with the Imperial house. His mother had been the governess of the Emperor Paul's children; when her task was over, she had retained the highest favour; and her son, at the age of twenty-eight, was aide-de-camp to the Emperor and Secretary for War. Paul I was murdered; but under the new Czar the family fortunes continued to prosper—the only change being the transference of the Count de Lieven from the army to the

diplomatic service. In 1809 he was appointed Russian ambassador at Berlin; and in 1812 he was moved to London, where he and his wife were to remain for the next twenty-two years.

The great world in those days was small—particularly the English one, which had been kept in a vacuum for years by the Napoleonic War. In 1812 a foreign embassy was a surprising novelty in London, and the arrival of the Lievens produced an excitement which turned to rapture when it was discovered that the ambassadress was endowed with social talents of the highest order. She immediately became the fashion—and remained so for the rest of her life. That she possessed neither beauty nor intellect was probably a positive advantage: she was attractive and clever—that was enough. Her long gawky figure and her too pronounced features were somehow fascinating, and her accomplishments were exactly suited to her *milieu*; while she hated reading, never opening a book except Madame de Sévigné's *Letters*, she could be very entertaining in four languages, and, if asked, could play on the pianoforte extremely well. Whenever she appeared, life was enhanced and intensified. She became the intimate friend of several great hostesses—Lady Holland, Lady Cowper, Lady Granville; she was successfully adored by several men of fashion—Lord Willoughby, Lord Gower, and (for a short time—so it was whispered) the Prince Regent himself. She was made a patroness of Almack's—the only foreign lady to receive the distinction. Exclusive, vigorous, tart, she went on her way rejoicing—and then there was a fresh development. The war over, the era of conferences opened. In 1818, at Aix-la-Chapelle, where all the ministers and diplomats of Europe were

gathered together, she met Metternich, then at the beginning of his long career as the virtual ruler of Austria, and a new and serious love-affair immediately began. It lasted during the four years that elapsed between the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle and that of Verona; and in Metternich's love-letters—extremely long and extremely metaphysical—the earlier stages of it may still be traced. The affair ended as suddenly as it had started. But this close relationship with the dominating figure in European politics had a profound effect on Madame de Lieven's life.

Henceforward, high diplomacy was to be her passion. She was nearly forty; it was time to be ambitious, to live by the head rather than the heart, to explore the mysteries of chanceries, to pull the strings of cabinets, to determine the fate of nations; she set to work with a will. Besides her native wits, she had two great assets—her position in English Society, and the fact that her husband was a nonentity—she found that she could simply step into his place. Her first triumph came when the Czar Alexander entrusted her personally with an overture to Canning on the thorny question of Greece. Alexander's death and the accession of Nicholas was all to the good: her husband's mother received a principedom, and she herself in consequence became a princess. At the same time Russia, abandoning the traditions of the Holy Alliance, drew nearer to England and the Liberal policy of Canning. Madame de Lieven became the presiding genius of the new orientation; it was possibly owing to her influence with George IV that Canning obtained the premiership; and it was certainly owing to her efforts that the Treaty of London was signed in 1827, by which the independence of Greece became an accomplished fact. After Canning's death, she formed a new connection—with

Lord Grey. The great Whig Earl became one of the most ardent of her admirers. Sitting up in bed every morning, he made it his first task to compose an elaborate epistle to his Egeria, which, when it was completed, he carefully perfumed with musk. The precise nature of their relationship has never transpired. The tone of their correspondence seems to indicate a purely Platonic attachment; but tones are deceitful, and Lord Grey was a man of many gallantries; however, he was sixty-eight. It is also doubtful who benefited most by the connection: possibly the lady's influence was less than she supposed. At any rate, it is certain that when, on one occasion, she threatened a withdrawal of her favours unless the Prime Minister adopted a particular course, she was met with a regretful, an infinitely regretful, refusal; upon which she tactfully collapsed. But, on another occasion, it seems possible that her advice produced an important consequence. When Lord Grey took office, who was to be Foreign Minister? Lady Cowper was Madame de Lieven's great friend, and Palmerston was Lady Cowper's lover. At their request, Madame de Lieven pressed the claims of Palmerston upon the Premier, and Palmerston was appointed. If this was indeed the result of her solicitations, the triumphant Princess was to find before long that she had got more than she had bargained for.

In the meantime, all went swimmingly. There was always some intriguing concoction on the European table—a revolution in Portugal—the affairs of Belgium to be settled—a sovereign to be found for Greece—and Madame de Lieven's finger was invariably in the pie. So we see her, in the *Memoirs* and *Letters* of the time, gliding along in brilliant activity, a radiating focus of enjoyment, except—ah! it was her one horror!—when she found

herself with a bore. If it was her highest felicity to extract, in an excited tête-à-tête, the latest piece of diplomatic gossip from a Cabinet Minister, her deepest agony was to be forced to mark time with undistinguished underlings, or—worst of all!—some literary person. On such occasions she could not conceal her despair—indeed, she hardly wished to—even from the most eminent, even from the great Châteaubriand himself. ‘Quand elle se trouve avec des gens de mérite,’ he acidly noted, ‘sa stérilité se tait; elle revêt sa nullité d’un air supérieur d’ennui, comme si elle avait le droit d’être ennuyée.’ She only admitted one exception: for royal personages very great allowances might be made. A royal bore, indeed, was almost a contradiction in terms; such a flavour of mysterious suavity hovered for ever round those enchanted beings. She was always at her best with them, and for her own particular royalties—for the Czar and the whole Imperial family—no considerations, no exertions, no adulations could be too great. She corresponded personally with her Imperial master upon every twist and turn of the international situation, and yet there were tedious wretches . . . she would not bear it, she would be ruthless, they should be *écrasés*—and she lifted her black eyebrows till they almost vanished and drew herself up to her thinnest height. She looked like some strange animal—what was it? Somebody said that Madame Appony, another slender, tall ambassadress, was like a giraffe, and that she and Madame de Lieven were of the same species. ‘Mais non!’ said Madame Alfred de Noailles, ‘ce n’est pas la même classe: l’une mangera l’autre et n’aura qu’un mauvais repas.’ ‘One sees Lieven,’ was Lady Granville’s comment, ‘crunching the meek Appony’s bones.’ Everyone was a little afraid of her—everyone, that is to say,



except Lady Holland; for 'Old Madagascar' knew no fear. One day, at a party, having upset her workbasket, she calmly turned to the ambassadress with, 'Pick it up, my dear, pick it up!' And Madame de Lieven went down on her knees and obeyed. 'Such a sight was never seen before,' said Lady Granville.

Lady Holland—yes; but there was also somebody else; there was Palmerston. Madame de Lieven, having (so she was convinced) got him his appointment as Foreign Secretary, believed that she could manage him; he was, she declared, 'un très-petit esprit'; the mistake was gross, and it was fatal. In 1834, Palmerston appointed Stratford Canning ambassador to Russia; but the Emperor disliked him, and let it be known, through Madame de Lieven, that he was unwilling to receive him. Palmerston, however, persisted in his choice, in spite of all the arguments of the ambassadress, who lost her temper, appealed to Lord Grey—in vain, and then—also in vain—tried to get up an agitation in the Cabinet. Finally she advised the Czar to stand firm, for Palmerston, she said, would give way when it came to the point. Accordingly, it was officially stated that Stratford Canning would not be received in Russia. The result, however, was far from Madame de Lieven's expectations. Palmerston had had enough of female interferences, and he decided to take this opportunity of putting an end to them altogether. He appointed no ambassador, and for months the English business in St. Petersburg was transacted by a *chargé d'affaires*. Then there happened precisely what the wily minister had foreseen. The Emperor could support the indignity no longer; he determined to retort in kind; and he recalled the Lievens.

So ended the official life of the Princess. The blow was



severe—the pain of parting was terrible—but, as it turned out, this was only the beginning of misfortune. In the following year, her two youngest sons died of scarlet fever; her own health was broken; stricken down by grief and illness, she gave up the Court appointment with which her services had been rewarded, and went to live in Paris. Suddenly she received a peremptory order of recall. Nicholas, with autocratic caprice, had flown into a fury: the Princess must return! Her husband, seeing that a chance of self-assertion had at last come to him, fell in with the Emperor's wishes. A third son died; and the Prince was forbidden to communicate the fact to his wife; she only learnt it, months later, when one of her letters to her son was returned to her, with the word 'mort' on the envelope. After that, there was a hectic correspondence, the Prince at one moment actually threatening to cut off his wife's supplies if she remained in Paris. She would not budge, however, and eventually the storm blew over; but the whole system of Madame de Lieven's existence had received a terrible shock. 'Quel pays!' she exclaimed in her anguish. 'Quel maître! Quel père!'

The instinct which had kept her in Paris was a sound one; for there, in that friendly soil, she was able to strike fresh roots and to create for herself an establishment that was almost a home. Her irrepressible social activities once more triumphed. Installed in Talleyrand's old house at the corner of the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue St. Florentin, with an outlook over the Place de la Concorde, she held her nightly *salon*, and, for another twenty years, revived the glories of her London reign. Though no longer in any official situation, she was still perpetually occupied with the highest politics, was still the terror of embassies, still

the delight of the worldly and the great. Still, in her pitiless exclusiveness, she would *écraser* from time to time some wretched creature from another sphere. 'Monsieur, je ne vous connais pas,' she said in icy tones to a gentleman who presented himself one evening in her *salon*. He reminded her of how often they had met at Ems, in the summer—had taken the waters together—surely she must remember him. 'Non, Monsieur', was the adamant reply, and the poor man slunk away, having learnt the lesson that friendship at Ems and friendship in Paris are two very different things.

Such was the appearance; but, in fact, something strange had happened: Madame de Lieven's aristocracy was trembling over the abyss. The crash came on June 24th, 1837—the date is significant: it was four days after the accession of Queen Victoria—when, worn out by domestic grief, disillusioned, embittered, unable to resist any longer the permeations of the Time Spirit, the Princess fell into the arms of Monsieur Guizot. Fate had achieved an almost exaggerated irony. For Guizot was the living epitome of all that was most middle-class. Infinitely respectable, a Protestant, the father of a family, having buried two wives, a learned historian, he had just given up the portfolio of public instruction, and was clearly destined to be the leading spirit of the bourgeois monarchy of Louis-Philippe. He was fifty years old. His first wife had been a child of the *ancien régime*, but he had tamed her, turned her thoughts towards duty and domesticity, induced her to write improving stories for the young, until at last, suddenly feeling that she could bear it no longer, she had taken refuge in death while he was reading aloud to her a sermon by Bossuet on the immortality of the soul. His second wife—the niece of the

first—had needed no such pressure; naturally all that could be wished, she wrote several volumes of improving stories for the young quite of her own accord, while reflections upon the beneficence of the Creator flowed from her at the slightest provocation; but she too had died; his eldest son had died; and the bereaved Guizot was left alone with his high-mindedness. Madame de Lieven was fifty-two. It seemed an incredible love-affair—so much so that Charles Greville, who had known her intimately all his life, refused to believe that it was anything but a ‘social and political’ *liaison*. But the wits of Paris thought otherwise. It was noticed that Guizot was always to be found in the house in the Rue St. Florentin. The malicious Mérimée told the story of how, after a party at the Princess’s, he had been the last to leave—except Guizot; how, having forgotten something, he had returned to the drawing-room, and found that the Minister had already taken off the ribbon (the ‘grand cordon’) of the Legion of Honour. A chuckle—a chuckle from beyond the tomb—reached the world from Châteaubriand. ‘Le ridicule attendait à Paris Madame de Lieven. Un doctinaire grave est tombé aux pieds d’Omphale: “Amour, tu perdis Troie”.’ And the wits of Paris were right. The *liaison*, certainly, was strengthened by political and social interests, but its basis was sentimental passion. The testimony of a long series of letters puts that beyond a doubt. In this peculiar correspondence, pedantry, adoration, platitudes, and suburban *minauderies* form a compound for which one hardly knows whether smiles or tears are the appropriate reaction. When Guizot begins a love-letter with ‘Le Cardinal de Retz dit quelque part’, one can only be delighted, but when Madame de Lieven exclaims, ‘Ah! que j’aurais besoin d’être gouvernée!’

Pourquoi ne me gouvernez-vous pas?' one is positively embarrassed. One feels that one is committing an unpardonable—a deliciously unpardonable—indiscretion, as one overhears the cooings of these antiquated doves. 'Si vous pouviez voir,' he says, with exquisite originality, 'tout ce qu'il y a dans mon cœur, si profond, si fort, si éternel, si tendre, si triste!' And she answers, 'Maintenant, je voudrais la tranquillité, la paix du cottage, votre amour, le mien, rien que cela. Ah! mon ami, c'est là le vrai bonheur.' La paix du cottage! Can this be really and truly Madame de Lieven?

Yet there was a point at which she did draw the line. After the death of the Prince in 1839, it was inevitable that there should be a suggestion of marriage. But it faded away. They were never united by any other vows than those which they had sworn to each other in the sight of heaven. It was rumoured that the difficulty was simply one of nomenclature. Guizot (one would expect it) judged that he would be humiliated if his wife's name were not his own; and the Princess, though wishing to be governed, recoiled at that. 'Ma chère, on dit que vous allez épouser Guizot,' said a friend. 'Est-ce vrai?' 'Oh! ma chère,' was the reply, 'me voyez-vous annoncée Madame Guizot!' Was this the last resistance of the aristocrat? Or was it, perhaps, in reality, the final proof that Madame de Lieven was an aristocrat no longer?

The idyll only ended with death—though there were a few interruptions. In 1848, revolution forced the lovers to fly to England; it also precipitated the aged Metternich, with a new young wife, upon these hospitable shores. The quartet spent a fortnight together at Brighton; until their discreet conversations were ended for ever by the restoration of order; and the *salon* in the Rue St. Florentin was

opened again. But a new dispensation was beginning, in which there was no place for the old minister of Louis-Philippe. Guizot stood aside; and, though Madame de Lieven continued to wield an influence under the Second Empire, it was a gradually declining one. The Crimean War came as a shattering blow. She had made it up with the Czar: their correspondence was once more in full swing; this was known, and, when war came, she was forced to leave Paris for Brussels. Her misery was complete, but it only lasted for eighteen months. She crept back on the plea of health, and Napoleon, leniently winking at her presence, allowed her to remain—allowed her at last to reopen, very gingerly, her *salon*. But everything now was disappearing, disintegrating, shimmering away. She was in her seventy-second year; she was ill and utterly exhausted; she was dying. Guizot, a veteran too, was perpetually at her bedside; she begged him at last to leave her—to go into the next room for a little. He obeyed, and she was dead when he returned to her. She had left a note for him, scribbled in pencil: 'Je vous remercie des vingt années d'affection et de bonheur. Ne m'oubliez pas. Adieu, Adieu.' At the last moment, with those simple and touching words, the old grandeur—the original essence that was Dorothea Benckendorf—had come into its own again.



V. SACKVILLE-WEST

## THE POET

I first saw him sitting at a little table outside a café in Italy. He was alone, and I knew him instantly for a poet, by his wild eyes, his tumbled hair, his sensitive nostrils, and his weak but beautiful mouth. He wore a faded blue shirt and a pair of blue linen trousers, with his bare feet thrust into heel-less *espadrilles*. At the moment when my eyes first fell upon him he was gazing sorrowfully into a glass of beer. I imagined that in those translucent amber depths he sought, perhaps, some simile for a mermaid's hair—the café was situated on the shores of the Mediterranean—but after a prolonged contemplation he beckoned to the waiter and said in Italian: 'There's a fly in this beer. Take it away.'

I was disappointed. I had been so certain he was a poet and that he was English. His appearance was so romantic, the lonely fishing-village was so romantic, too, just the place for a poet, with its little harbour and the painted boats swaying softly on the dark green water, and the Mediterranean beyond, and the fishermen's houses in a semicircle, the colour of tea roses and tulips, and the nets hung out to dry, and the lovely hills rising behind, silvery with the olive-trees. Now it seemed that he was a native, a peasant, perhaps, come down from the hills to catch the evening coolness of the port, and to drink his glass before climbing back to bed: a native, a peasant, unlettered, and a materialist into the bargain. As I watched him, he rose, and slouching away he vanished through a little green



door into a neighbouring house. I heard him coughing as he went.

On the following evening I saw him again in the same place. His glass of beer stood beside him, his elbow was propped on the table, his cheek propped on his hand, and he was reading in a small book bound in calf, the pages slightly foxed. I passed behind him, and looked over his shoulder. He was reading Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, in a seventeenth-century edition. My spirits revived. I felt that my assumption had been justified.

As I sat down at another table and ordered my vermouth and selz, unfolding my *Daily Mail* meanwhile rather ostentatiously, I felt rather than saw that he had raised his head and was glancing in my direction. I bided my time, paying no attention. Presently I heard, as I had known I would hear, the scraping of his chair on the tiled floor. He was edging himself towards me. He wanted to enter into conversation. I cursed myself for a brute as I heard his first apologetic cough develop into a terrible, a heartrending attack of coughing. I flung my *Daily Mail* aside, and hastily poured him out a glass of water. 'By God, you're ill,' I said.

He put his handkerchief to his lips and brought it away stained with red. 'Ill?' he said, and stretched a shaking hand. 'There's death in that hand,' he said with a twisted smile.

That jarred me. I had dramatized him to myself, heaven knows, but that he should dramatize himself was more than I could bear. I was divided between distress at his ill-health and disgust at his exploitation of it. In consequence I spoke rather briskly, asking him what ailed him—though it was clear enough.

He was ready to talk. He hadn't spoken his own lan-

guage for three months, he told me. He had come to Santa Caterina to die. He thought it couldn't be long now, but he didn't mind: he didn't care for life, so long as it gave him time to accomplish that which he must accomplish. He thought he had done his best by now, and was quite ready to go.

And what, I asked, was he so anxious to accomplish?

'I write poetry,' he said, quite simply this time.

He was twenty-five years of age, he told me, and his name was Nicholas Lambarde. That seemed to me a good name for an English poet, in the tradition of Kit Marlowe, Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, and the rest. English poets had nearly always been endowed with good names, and Nicholas Lambarde might figure as honestly in an alphabetical index as the others. But, although I keep an eye on poetry, I had never heard of him. A mere name was not enough to make me take him on trust. What poetry, I asked, had he written? Had any of it been published?

No, he said, he had never bothered about publication. He cared nothing about contemporary fame. Posterity was the only thing that counted, and about posterity he had no doubt at all. He began then to talk of his poetry, dashing his hands through his hair; he talked extravagantly, lyrically; but somehow—although sceptical, I think, by nature, and not readily impressed—I couldn't feel that he was boasting in a void, or that the claims he made were in any way in excess of their justification. I couldn't explain to myself why he thus immediately convinced me. Perhaps his very scorn for present fame did its part, a scorn so rare and so manifestly genuine. At any rate, when he told me that he had that morning written a real poem, a true contribution to English literature, I

believed him. And, in a way, as my story will show, I was right. He had.

He held very definite and vigorous views about poetry. He couldn't abide the modern school of *défaitisme* and despair. He couldn't feel—dying man though he was—that life was little more than the sloughed skin of a snake, or a rustle of dry leaves, or a parched land without water, or whatever the metaphor might be. Nor did he feel that poetry was the proper vehicle for metaphysics, any more than fiction was the proper vehicle for propaganda, sexual or sociological. He held that poetry ought to spring from its own soil, and break freely into leaves like a tree, with a suggestion of sky above and of roots beneath, drinking deeply in the earth. He believed profoundly in the technique of the craft, and held that the first use of technique was to suggest, by association, far greater riches than actually stated by the words. In fact, rapturously though he expressed himself, he displayed a considered judgement and talked a great deal of sense.

He never read poetry nowadays, he said, for fear of being influenced, though, of course, he had read through the whole of English literature in his early youth.

Every now and then he broke off to cough and to dab his handkerchief against his mouth.

Well, I stayed on at Santa Caterina. Nicholas Lambarde, invisible in the daytime, appeared regularly every evening at the café, ordered his glass of beer, joined me at my table, and talked poetry to me, while the stars came out and the lights of the harbour dropped their plummets into the water. I watched him growing a little paler, a little thinner every day. His fits of coughing became more frequent and more violent. Still, when I exhorted him, he impatiently brushed aside my importunity and went on

with what he was saying. The only important thing in the world to him was poetry. Death did not matter, health did not matter, nor time, nor fame, nor money: I never met anyone who lived so intensely or so continuously the life of the spirit. I can see him now, with his burning eyes, his unshaven chin cupped in his hands, and the stained handkerchief crumpled between his fingers, leaning across the table, talking, talking.

One evening he said that he would like to ask me a favour. He had no friends and no relations, he said, and the only thing which bothered him was the disposal of his manuscripts after he was dead. He had thought of consigning them all to a literary agency, but that seemed an insecure thing to do, for who could guarantee that any literary agency would find him a publisher? Poetry did not pay—he knew that—and he feared that the eventual fate of his poems might be the waste-paper basket. On the one hand, you see, he was curiously sane. On the other, he was absolutely confident that in, say, a hundred years' time he would be recognized as the head of English song. He made a possible exception in favour of Shakespeare, but admitted no other rivals. If, that is to say, he had his chance, and that must be my business. In short, he asked me to act as his literary executor.

Of course, I accepted. No one could have refused him, and I was, as you may imagine, consumed with the desire to read these poems of which I had heard so much. Often though I urged him, he would never show me a line, but putting on an expression at once arrogant and secretive, would reply: 'All in good time! You'll see, you'll see.'

It was on a morning in early May that a fisher-boy came breathlessly to find me, saying that the Englishman had died during the night: would I please come at once? I had

never before penetrated into Lambarde's lodging, and it was with an uncomfortable sense of intrusion that I mounted the rickety stairs and stood upon the threshold of his room. I had not expected to find him surrounded by many possessions, but neither had I been prepared for such utter barrenness and poverty. He himself lay upon, not in, the bed, dressed as usual in his faded shirt and trousers, as though he had flung himself down in the last fatal access of coughing—for the sheets and counterpane were stained with a deeper flood than ever his pitiable handkerchief. One glance round gave me the complete inventory of the room. A pair of brushes, a comb, a razor; a bunch of wild jonquils stuck in a bottle, some shoes, a few books, mostly tattered. That was all I could see. But there were papers everywhere—strewn over the bed, over the one table, and even over the floor—separate sheets of foolscap, some closely covered, some scrawled with but a single line, tossed aside, blown by the breeze into some neglected corner. His landlady, who had followed me upstairs, doubtless thought that she read criticism in my glance.

He would never allow her to tidy, she said; sometimes for weeks together he had locked the door and she had been unable to enter his room; and once, when she had ventured to pick up some of his papers and place them on the table, he had flown into the most terrible rage, so that she thought he would expire on the spot. It was comprehensible, she said, with the Latin peasant's understanding of the artist: the poor young man was a poet, and poets were cursed with that kind of temperament; one could not expect a stag to browse mildly like a cow. And she looked at him, lying upon the bed, with a compassion that forgave him all his trespasses.



But now he could prevent nobody from picking up his papers and arranging them on the table. It was, indeed, precisely what he had asked me to do, yet I did it with a sense of guilt, induced, no doubt, by my own knowledge of my own curiosity. Outwardly I was executing the wishes of a dead compatriot: in reality, I was gratifying the meanest of our instincts. Yet why should I blacken myself unduly? I love letters, I respect genius; I had lent a sympathetic ear to an unknown poet for weeks past; I had upset all my plans on his account. It was only fair that I should have my reward.

And yet, I swear, it wasn't only my reward that I thought of—the reward of discovering a new master of English verse. I honestly wanted to do my best by that proud, lonely, flaming creature who had lived for nothing but his art.

I persuaded the good wife to leave me, and, alone with the dead man, I fell to my task. You must believe me when I say that I have seldom been more excited. At first I was puzzled, for many of the writings were so exceedingly fragmentary; there were scraps of scenes from plays, whose characters bore names in the Elizabethan tradition—Baldassare, Mercurio, and the like; there were a few verses of what appeared to be a ballad; there were some ribald addresses to Chloe and Dorinda; there was the beginning of a contemplative poem on Solitude. I fancied from all these that he had been practising his hand at the art of parody, for he had hit off the Elizabethan manner exactly, and the manner of the ballads, and of the Restoration, and of the early nineteenth century. Whatever else he had been, he was certainly a skilful parodist; I was sure that I had read something very like his play-scenes in some minor work of Kyd or



Shirley, I couldn't remember which. But I turned over his poor papers impatiently, in the hope of coming on one of those poems of which he had said to me, 'Lord! I'm tired, but I did something good to-day, something really first-class. I'm pleased.'

And I found them. I found the really first-class things. He was quite right: they really were first-class. He had taken an enormous amount of trouble, putting his pencil through word after word, until he got exactly the word he wanted. That was the extraordinary thing: the amount of trouble he had taken in his search for perfection, carving each phrase laboriously from his brain, working it out like a puzzle; I could imagine him sitting there at that same table, concentrated, rapt, dissatisfied at first, and finally triumphant; I could imagine him springing up at last with a cry of triumph and pacing about the room declaiming the magnificent stanzas to himself. It had been a terrific effort, but he had always got it right in the end.

One of his first drafts ran thus:

Fair star! I would I were as faithful as thou art,  
Not in sole glory piercing through the night,  
But watching with unsleeping lids apart

eremite

The restless ocean at its patient task  
Of slow erosion round earth's aged shores.

The pencil had been dashed through the last two lines,  
and he had substituted with scarcely a check:

The moving waters at their priest-like task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

Yes, I thought, no wonder he was pleased with that; no wonder he had come down to the café to tell me he had done something really good!

And there were other passages which had worried him considerably:

But after me I seem to hear  
The wheels of Time                      near

A fiery spirit                      ? bright                      and swift

The Earth like Danae  
Like Danae the Earth  
Under the stars the Earth like Danae lies.

But he had got that right, too, nearly the whole of it, except one line, for which he had left a blank.

I sat back and stared at his papers. What had gone wrong in that poor muddled brain? What fantastic trick had memory played upon him? I remembered how he had told me that he had quite given up reading the poets now, 'for fear of being influenced', though he had read them extensively as a boy. Influenced, indeed! The irony of it!

And yet, you know, I still maintain that a poet was lost in him. I found among his papers one sonnet, which, with the obvious though partial exception of the first line, I have so far been unable to trace to anybody else. It is not the kind of poetry which brought him downstairs to tell me that he had done something 'really good'; it is, indeed, only a sonnet of a type which could be turned out in dozens by any competent rhymester, soaked in the conventions of English literature; the octet may pass muster, but the sextet is poor, as though scribbled down

in a hurry; and probably I exaggerate the merit of the whole, being privy to the absolute truth which inspired it; but such as it is it may very well stand as his epitaph:

When I am gone, say only this of me:  
He scorned the laurels and the praise of men,  
Alien to fortune and to fame; but then  
Add this: he plunged with Thetis in the sea;  
Lay naked with Diana in the shade;  
He knew what paths the wandering planets drew;  
He heard the music of the winds; he knew  
What songs the sirens sang; Arion played.

Say this; no more; but when the shadows lengthen  
Across the greensward of your cloistered turf,  
Remember one who felt his sinews strengthen  
And tuned his hearing by the line of surf.

One who, too proud, passed ease and comfort by,  
But learned from Rome and Hesiod how to die.

JOHN HAMPSON

## THE SIGHT OF BLOOD

Everyone in the house was busy spring-cleaning, so mother said I might go to Mr. Bourne by myself.

'Short at the back and the fringe trimmed,' she instructed me. 'Soon I shall be grown up,' I thought with pride as I walked solemnly along. It was right for me to do this important thing by myself. Mr. Bourne would be awfully surprised. He might ask: 'Is there anybody ill at the Rectory?' If he did I would answer in a light voice, 'Oh, no, thank you,' and smile scornfully.

Very conscious of my own greatness, I marched into the barber's shop and pushed open the swing door of the saloon. Mr. Bourne was alone. This was a disappointment. It would have been fitting to find several customers there to witness my achievement. Mr. Bourne sat with a newspaper spread out on his lap. He looked up from it swiftly, a frown creasing his brow. 'Well, young man,' he asked, gruffly, 'and what do you want, eh? Have you come to buy another dunce's cap?'

I felt hot, and was glad after all to be the only customer. 'Good morning, Mr. Bourne,' I said quickly, 'I have come to have my hair cut. Short at the back, and the fringe trimmed, please.'

He helped me to climb on to a high stool, then draped a large print sheet carefully over my clothes. I looked round the room curiously, wishing that I might meddle and pry among the stock. It would be nice to uncork all the bottles and smell all the different coloured liquids. If ever I had a lot of money, perhaps I would buy Mr.



Bourne's shop, then I could be the barber and have great fun. All the dunces' caps would go on a bonfire.

On the wall in front of me hung a large mirror; in it I watched the barber at work. He was a small, dark man, very neat and quick, with a long white apron fastened tightly round his waist. His hair was coarse and dark, rich with oil. It did not look real. His hands worked deftly, snip, snip. I played a secret game, fumbling with my fingers under the cloth so that the twists of severed hair fell to the floor. Then I was a royal king, clad in a robe of delicate purple. Mr. Bourne was the high priest. Together we were celebrating a mystic rite, I, being about to leave the sinful world for a life of holy effort, watched my locks, as shorn away they dropped, tailing my garb with ermine, seeing in it a symbol of sacrifice. It was very beautiful, though sad.

Then the door swung open, breaking my dream, and Mr. Braddle, the publican, came in. He wore no coat. The sleeves of his shirt were rolled up above the elbows, the neck was unfastened, showing his thick throat and a V-shaped piece of flesh spangled with ginger hairs. His head was nearly bald, the long strands of hair combed carefully over the dome failing to deceive. I noticed his face was curious, very red and somehow sodden. A moustache jutted out over his top lip, like the frayed ends of an old door-mat. His eyes stuck out slightly, they were blue and watery. His face looked surprised and hurt. Mr. Bourne greeted him with grave dignity, mouthing carefully stiff, polite phrases.

'Good morning, Mr. Braddle, I was grieved indeed to hear of your sad bereavement.'

Mr. Braddle burst into tears. 'Thank you, thank you,' he said, gulping. Then he sat down on a form blowing his

nose vigorously. He still wept. It was very wrong of an old man like that to cry, I thought, as Mr. Bourne began to snip, snip again. I hated seeing Mr. Braddle weep. It seemed wrong for me to watch. It made me feel ashamed, so I turned my head away with a quick movement.

Mr. Bourne said sharply: 'Tut-tut-tut; keep still, can't you?'

Presently Mr. Braddle's noisy weeping ceased. He started talking, and I, listening, watched Mrs. Braddle die.

Mr. Braddle woke up with a jerk. It was dark like pitch. He sat up, asking in a voice still thick with sleep: 'What's that, eh, Rose, what's that?' Hearing only her heavy breathing, he leaned forward, touching her forehead. It felt cold, and Rose, as if in answer to his touch, said slowly, 'I'm that bad, Joe!'

Mr. Braddle got quickly out of bed. He lit a candle, the cold air chilling his bare legs. Soon the golden light ceased teasing his eyes. Rose lay high up in the bed, her head, with its loose mane of grey hair, lolling off the pillow. Her face was crimson, the eyes closed, and her jaws clenched tightly, making her mouth small. She started to shake. The bed rattled a crazy tune in time with her movements. At last a cough came bursting from her. It was like an explosion. Then a little thread of scarlet blood ran out of her mouth, travelling swiftly down her chin till it was dammed by the high collar of her nightgown. Mr. Braddle watched stupidly, feeling fearful. He ought to do something. That was the idea. Do something. He unbuttoned the neck of Rose's flannel nightgown with trembling fingers. The line of blood thickened, wetting his hands. He had better fetch Edie. She took a lot of waking, but was soon down in the bedroom, gaping



at Rose. She looked comic, to say the least of it, Edie did, with an old tweed skirt on over her nightdress. It was funny to think of that at such a time as this. Rose was very ill. But she could not die. Mr. Braddle had often seen dead people, for his house was used by the county coroner. He had seen his own mother as she lay neatly tucked up in her coffin. She had died nicely, in her sleep. He was a fool to worry so. Rose would laugh at him later.

Edie bustled about the bedroom. She fetched up brandy from the bar, then roused young Joe out of sleep and sent him scuttling for the doctor. She got hot water bottles, putting them at Rose's icy feet. She did all sorts of things in a quick flurry of movement, some wise, some foolish.

Mr. Braddle greeted the doctor with glad anxiety. Now Rose would be all right. The doctor looked at Rose and shook his head gravely. Mr. Braddle received a shock. Surely the doctor must be mistaken. Rose would be all right. He knew that she would soon feel better. He had told her so, and it had comforted them both.

Suddenly Rose coughed again, doubling up. Then she relaxed, quivering, her chin a bloody beard. Mr. Braddle commenced weeping. Rose gazed at him, fear in her eyes.

'You'll be all right, m'dear,' he said in a thick voice, clasping her cold hands tightly with his own. 'I'll not let none get you!' What could he do to help her? Surely there was something he could do. She looked ghastly now. What could he do to help her? Then Mr. Braddle knew that neither he nor anyone else could help her. His hands beat the air feebly. He protested foolishly against inexorable death that crept slowly on. Rose never took her piteous gaze from him, till, wrenched again in a futile

effort to stop an issuing cough, she rolled over, drawing her knees up towards her chin.

He would have to sleep alone for the future. He whimpered. If only Rose would not die. What would be the use of anything if she died? Mr. Braddle prayed furiously, stumbling over the words, as he tried to persuade God to alter His mind. Rose spoke, asking him slowly: 'Am I?' He could not answer her. But she knew, saying to him, 'Kiss me, Joe.' He kissed her wet mouth hungrily, beseeching her with his tears, 'Don't go, Rose, don't, don't!' She smiled and her mouth fell open. She had no longer the strength to keep the sagging lips together. The blood gushed forth faster, faster. He kissed her forehead, abandoning God, willing her with his tears to live. But she, giving one more heave, sat up quickly, then fell backwards.

Still feeling giddy, I sat up and looked round. Mr. Braddle had gone. I was sitting on the floor, which struck coldly through my knickerbockers. Mr. Bourne was kneeling by my side, armed with a basin of sweet-scented water and a sponge. He dabbed my forehead gently, asking: 'How do you feel now, eh? Do you often go off like that?'

'Better now,' I answered, then asked: 'Where is Mr. Braddle?'

Mr. Bourne said gently: 'He went as soon as you fainted. Very touched he was, too. It upset him again, proper. Quite a tribute, he called it. What made you, eh?'

'The sight of blood!' I answered proudly, hoping he would realize that I was a delicate and important boy.

E. H. LACON WATSON

THE DAUGHTER  
OF THE ARCHDEACON

The fact is, I suppose, he had always been so good to her—had even spoiled her—as all the families in the neighbourhood maintained, that it had come upon her with a shock of incredulous surprise when, for once in a way, he seemed inclined to take the opposite view to her own in a matter so special and intimate. For even at that time it was considered unusual for parents to ‘put their foot down’, as the phrase went, when some candidate for their daughter’s hand did not strike them as altogether suitable. As soon expect them to storm up and down the room, cutting off their legitimate heirs with a shilling, or disposing of unwelcome suitors with authentic kicks.

Nothing of that sort, of course, could possibly come from the Archdeacon. He spoke, indeed, with an almost exaggerated reluctance. He had been thinking over what she had told him the night before, and the more he thought of it the more he was convinced that she was making a grave mistake. His voice shook a little as he said this. It was the first time, at all events since her mother died, that he had felt obliged to warn her solemnly against something on which she had set her heart.

Maud Sumner felt a curious pain, real and sharp, like a stab, in her left side. She caught her breath, but she was a brave girl, and her father’s obvious difficulty in bringing out what he said had its effect upon her. Also, ever since Kneller had spoken (which was only two short days ago) she had felt somehow that this could not be quite real,

not a part of the actual fabric of life. Because Captain Kneller belonged, so to speak, to another world.

That had clearly been the chief objection to him in the Archdeacon's mind.

'I am afraid, my dear girl,' he said, 'that Captain Kneller moves in a set with which we have very little in common.' He clasped and unclasped his long, slender fingers. 'I might say—nothing whatever in common,' he corrected himself mildly.

She stood by the side of his chair, looking out of the study window and, to tell the truth, seeing very little of what was outside. There was not much to see at any time, except a plantation of shrubs shutting out the kitchen-garden from the view of the inferior clergy who came to interview him.

'Oh, Daddy, we've always got on together most awfully well.'

It came out before she thought, but even as she spoke she was conscious that it was not a sufficient answer. She did not know much of the world, but she could not help seeing that Captain Kneller was one of those men who 'go the pace' pretty severely. You had only to look at him doing anything—following the hounds or at a hunt ball, or even playing lawn tennis at a garden party (and that was where she felt most at home with him)—to recognize at once the sort of man he was. That was what attracted her so much, in a way.

Was it not strange and sweetly flattering that he should have chosen her instead of one of his own set? A drab moth when he might have chosen a gay butterfly. Not that she was exactly a drab moth—but still. She had never pretended to be one of that rather loud-voiced, expensively dressed set.

Her father was speaking again. She had some little difficulty in following what he said.

‘—as it may be,’ he was saying. ‘The important thing is your happiness, my dear child. There must be some common ground on which husband and wife can meet.’

‘Don’t you think,’ she put in, ‘that we may have kept ourselves rather too much—out of that set?’

She had meant to say ‘too much aloof’ or something of that kind, but she was afraid of hurting him. Indubitably they had always rather fenced themselves round, looking perhaps too critically at their neighbours. And life might be so interesting, were it not for these fences constructed by the old and experienced.

For reply, her father merely shook his head. But he took her hand in his—perhaps because her fingers were nervously playing with the lapel of his coat.

‘It’s really serious, my dear?’

It was too serious to laugh off. She tried, but a very half-hearted laugh ended in a sigh. Because all the time she felt secretly in her heart that he was quite right. The gap between herself and Captain Kneller was too wide to be easily bridged.

‘I don’t think you could ever be really happy,’ he said, as though that finally closed the question.

She told herself that she did not expect happiness, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. Why should anyone look for happiness in this imperfect world? And was there not something selfish in the habit of placing this prospect of personal comfort before everything? She told herself, as she left her father’s study and turned into her own particular room looking over the tennis lawn, that she was not just one of those silly girls who fall violently in love and refuse to see any faults in their hero. She knew



exactly, or thought she knew, where Captain Kneller would be most likely to go wrong—the traits in his character that would make the most certainly for domestic discomfort. And yet, in spite of all that, surely it was worth risking.

Quite clearly, he was one of that class that her mother, in the old days, used to lump together under the common designation of ‘fast’ men. He played bridge whenever he got a chance, and he talked quite openly of the money he won or lost backing horses, and quite probably he drank and swore and committed other crimes that necessarily put him outside the pale at once—from the point of view of archdeacons’ wives and their kind. Yes! she knew perfectly well that every one of their own little set would say at once that the girl who married Captain Kneller had no very pleasant prospect in front of her.

You had only to look at his friends to see the manner of man he was. She had hinted as much to him the other day at the Foresters’ garden party, after the final of the mixed doubles, which they had won together. Every year the Foresters got up a sort of private tournament. She remembered the exact moment of his asking her to enter with him.

She remembered almost every word they had ever exchanged, for that matter. That last scene was always coming before her eyes, as clear as a proposal on the stage. And it never failed to send a hot flush through her at the end. She could not think what possessed her to say anything about it, then—unless it were sheer nervousness.

She had been horridly nervous. And on the other hand he had seemed so absolutely cool and self-possessed. They had just wandered into the pine wood, outside the garden, through that rustic gate. She had never been through



there before; and then they suddenly came upon a garden seat, with a rug over it, and cushions. Evidently some of the family had been sitting there in the morning and had left the things there when they went in to lunch.

'I say, here's a bit of luck,' he said. 'Haven't left any drinks behind, I suppose? Shall we sit down a bit, Miss Sumner?'

There seemed nothing else to be done. But she saw it all coming. She knew as well as possible that he had captured her there, and she would have to go through with it. What was there to be so nervous about, after all? Girls didn't get like that now when a mere proposal was imminent. It was prehistoric.

And Captain Kneller displayed no more sign of nerves than if he were going to ask for a dance.

'Strikes me we do rather well as a pair,' he said.

Maud was convinced he must have heard the audible gasp she made to recover her breath.

'I—I thought you played awfully well that last set,' she managed to say.

And then he looked at her in that rather funny way he had, eyes just a little screwed up, as though he were looking out for Arabs in the desert, or something of that kind. Somehow, that always had a great effect upon her. The tanned, hard-bitten face gave the impression of a man who had been through a good deal in his life, and would understand. It is the men who have never done anything in the world who get so irritated with trifles. She remembered hearing her aunt say that.

'Fact is, Miss Sumner, I want you as a partner—permanently.'

That was the actual form of the proposal. He made no more of it than that. His rather reddish-brown eyes

looked quite straight at her, scrutinizingly. She could not face them: she had to turn to examining her racquet strings with pretended anxiety.

'I wonder if it would do, Captain Kneller,' she managed to say at last.

'Do? Why not?'

He was so direct that it threw her off her balance.

'I don't—quite know that I like some of your friends.' Now, was not that a ridiculous thing to say? She had not meant to say it in the least: it was just that frenzied seeking for something that would serve as an excuse. She felt herself blushing horribly. And yet it was true, in a way. She never had liked those men who went about with him everywhere.

But he took it up. Of course he would. And his face all wrinkled up, as though he were secretly amused.

'Why, which in particular?' he asked. 'Not young Packe, eh?'

And that made her more nervous than ever.

'No. At least, I mean—no, I oughtn't to have said that, Captain Kneller. I don't know what possessed me.'

He continued to treat it all as though it were a joke, or a guessing competition, or something of that kind.

'Then I'll bet it's John Culver,' he said triumphantly. 'What price old John, eh?'

Maud became so confused that she hardly knew what she was saying.

'I don't think Lord John is—is a real friend,' she began. It wasn't fair of him to lead her on like that, making her ridiculous. She felt as though she would break down altogether in a moment. 'He's not—not good enough for you,' she managed to say. And then her eyes began to

smart. She tried her best to stop it, but she felt a tear splash on her hand.

Of course, that was the end. He saw everything—Geoffrey Kneller did. He just said: 'Here, I say, you know,' in a sort of protesting manner, but very comforting. And then, before she knew what had happened, his arm was right round her waist and she had hidden her face in the rough cloth of his coat. The smell of it came back to her now.

After that, of course, to all intents and purposes they were engaged. They were engaged still, in spite of anything her father had said. He might say that it would never do, but that was only because he was so absurdly anxious for her happiness. She would explain it all to him in time, if it became necessary. But there was no particular hurry. She was only just twenty. They would both have to wait a year or two, in any case, and the time might well be employed in—well! you might call it rescuing Geoffrey from his friends. Shepherding him into the right path, and weaning him gradually from those habits that shadowed his otherwise perfect character.

It must be confessed that Maud was rather like that. She told herself at intervals that she was not in any way the typical daughter of a clergyman. She had no liking for parochial work. She hated the thought of messing about in stuffy cottages, calling on and patronizing old women who had quite enough work on their hands without having to stop in the middle and dust a chair for her accommodation. And she never knew what they might not be going to say next, or what she ought to reply. It was most embarrassing. Fortunately, the Archdeacon had never encouraged that sort of thing.

All the same, the missionary spirit was there, ready and

willing to be employed—if the field were not too unpleasant. She had an almost passionate desire to be useful, to do some real good in the world. If her father had a fault it was that he did not seem to recognize that his daughter might be languishing for want of a Purpose in Life. She was glad enough that he had not tried to turn her into the customary parish drudge, like the daughter of old Mr. Billson, at Duncote. But there could be no reason why she might not do real good in some higher circle. Who could doubt that Geoffrey had a fine nature if he were only guided aright?

Decidedly, it was his friends who were the danger. She did not mind young Jimmy Packe. He seemed harmless enough—only rather loud-voiced and empty-headed. But that little baronet who stammered so, Sir Gerald Fawcus, had something about him that always vaguely disturbed her—a look in his eyes that seemed to give a glimpse of an unclean soul. Maud was firmly convinced that she could invariably tell when there was something seriously wrong with a man. And Lord John Culver—in a way, he was worse still.

That is to say, her instinct told her that he was more dangerous to Geoffrey. The man was not straight. He was not bad-looking—aristocratic, in a way, like all the Culvers—but his eyes were too close together, and his long nose went obliquely to one side. Of course, she did not rely exclusively on these physical signs, but still. . . .

‘I wish you didn’t go about with him quite so much,’ she said to Geoffrey one afternoon, nerving herself to the point of direct speech with some difficulty. She remembered exactly how and where she had said it. He had ridden over, and they were standing on the terrace, just by the stone steps on the east side, which is out of sight

of the world unless it chooses to stick its head out of the upstairs windows and look round the corner. Also, she was standing very close to him, and fingering the top button of his coat with a sort of nervousness mingled with a delightful sense of property. Did not this remarkable young man belong to her, in a sense?

‘Eh? What is it now?’ he asked, in that quick, humorous way of his. ‘Which of them am I to give up this time? Old John again?’

She let her candid blue eyes rest on his for a moment. There was something extraordinarily soothing about the tones of his voice: when he spoke, or rather when she heard him speaking, even if it were to someone else, it sent through her a real thrill of sensuous pleasure.

‘I’m sure he—he isn’t trustworthy,’ she breathed.

How Geoffrey had laughed. It made her quite hot to think of it, even now.

‘Poor old chap,’ he said. ‘Trustworthy? I don’t suppose he is. Thorough old rogue, I should say. Never trust him farther than I can see him. That’s why I like to keep him with me, eh?’

And she didn’t know in the least what to say. She never did know how to take Geoffrey when he talked like that.

‘I really mean it. I’m not joking, Geoffrey.’

His eyes all wrinkled up in that way they had.

‘You must manage to like him better, somehow,’ he said with undiminished cheerfulness. ‘Hang it, we’ve been about together ever since I can remember. He’s coming out to Nairobi with me next month.’

She looked at him with startled eyes. Why was he going away, and why had he said nothing about it before?

He gave his characteristic little twitch of the shoulders.



He had six months' leave, and someone had told him there was money out there if he kept his eyes open, and, anyway, it was not a bad place for lions.

'Lions?' she repeated, and then again: 'I wish you were not going with him.'

He scrutinized her face again with those reddish-brown eyes of his. What was it precisely that she did not like about old John Culver? Of course, everyone knew that his father, the old Marquess, had been pretty hot stuff. Might be a touch of insanity in the family. But as for John himself, he would as soon have him with him in a tight place as any man—a lot more than most.

She had nothing to say—at least nothing in the least worth saying. She didn't like his eyes: that was the main thing that stuck in her mind. Not only because they looked shifty, but they had such a curious hungry look. Once or twice she had caught him unawares with his eyes fixed on her, and it had given her quite a turn.

Geoffrey laughed again. It would have made her furious if it had been anyone else. Even as it was—

'I wish you wouldn't laugh at me when I say anything I really think,' she said, still fingering the lapel of his coat.

And then she was suddenly squeezed close, so close that she really thought she was going to faint. Held there, she was conscious of a curious conflict going on in her brain. Satisfaction, mingled with a shade of annoyance (because she could never get him to see things from her point of view), and just a touch of shame (being aware that she had deliberately played for that sudden embrace) and, through it all, the old wonder whether they were really suited to each other at all.

'How the deuce could anyone help looking at you hungrily, I should like to know?' he asked.



When she managed to see his face again it was indubitable that he had very much the same sort of look in his own eyes. She did not mind it quite so much from him—but she would rather not have seen it. She gave a momentary shudder.

‘What’s the matter, little girl?’

‘I wish you were back again, safe.’

‘You bet I’ll be back as soon as I can,’ he affirmed with conviction. ‘And if I get clawed by a lion out there I’ll leave old John to you in my will.’

‘I don’t think you ought to joke about such things,’ said Maud, the Archdeacon’s daughter suddenly assuming command.

That was the last time she had seen him, before they went off. She had gone up to London, where she had an aunt, in order to see the last of him. That time seemed in the retrospect unnaturally gay—a rapid succession of dinners and theatres and other shows. Never had she been through anything to compare with it before. All four of them used to go about together. She got almost tired of the ceaseless round, and she was hardly ever alone with Geoffrey, even for a moment. Everything was very well done, no doubt, and it ought to have been the time of her life, but even then the shadow of some disaster seemed to be overhanging her. Her aunt, however, enjoyed it immensely. Lord John produced such an impression on her that she had hardly ceased talking of him since.

And that was nearly a year ago now.

What a child she had been in those days. Looking back on them now, she felt like an old, old woman, full of experience and the knowledge of life. So many things had happened since that hectic week. She had become inde-

pendent, for one thing. Her father, the Archdeacon, had died suddenly in the early winter, caught by a deceptive patch of warm weather sandwiched between two cold spells. And she had succeeded to all his property—such as it was. To tell the truth, she did not know yet in the least to what figure it all amounted, for mathematics had never been her strong point, and the family solicitor, old Stephen Tarrant, of Fleckney, was one of those men who would never give a straight answer. Perhaps it was partly her own fault, for she never liked to ask directly how much there was: it looked horrid, as though she thought of nothing but her own comfort, and it was made worse by the fact that he always used that word.

‘We don’t know yet exactly what it is, Miss Maud,’ he said, ‘but you ought to be pretty comfortably off. Very comfortably, I should say.’

The old man had known her all her life, it was true, but she did wish he wouldn’t go on calling her ‘Miss Maud’.

‘You couldn’t give me some idea,’ she would hesitate, nervously. ‘You see, I hate getting into debt. Do you suppose I shall have—three hundred a year when it’s all settled up?’ She had meant to say five hundred, but it sounded so much to her. And old Tarrant merely pursed his lips, and nodded his head slowly, like a Chinese mandarin, and said he thought he might venture as far as that. Yes, yes, certainly it ought to come out to—considerably more than that. But he would not say how much, and she did not like to press him any farther.

And, of course, it was not in the least herself that she was considering. But it might mean an awful lot to Geoffrey, out there in Nairobi, among the lions. She wished he were back again, to help her with it all; and

yet, in a way, she was rather glad he wasn't. She could not be quite sure whether his alert, confident manner of dealing with everything would not sound—a little disrespectful to the late Archdeacon. Still, she would have liked to be able to give him all the particulars. Though whether it would be quite wise was another question. The way Geoffrey always talked about money produced a curious fluttering feeling in the heart. He had no real reverence for Investments. She felt dimly that he would be quite capable of selling them and living on the proceeds—even perhaps of putting the result on a horse.

She wrote and told him what she could. But month succeeded month, and she got no reply to her letter. Geoffrey was not a great writer, as she knew, but this was news that ought to have drawn an answer of some sort. Maud began to feel aggrieved, and then anxious, and then to see-saw between the two emotions. The last letter she had received from him was dated quite three months ago. A sudden surge of resentment swept through her mind. She was convinced that Lord John Culver was somehow at the bottom of it all. Why had she ever allowed Geoffrey to take such a companion with him?

And then, suddenly, had come the cable. A thing like nothing she had ever seen before: when she opened the envelope and saw the printed block-letters staring at her, it seemed that her heart absolutely stopped beating. She had to hold on to the table for support until she recovered.

REGRET REPORT KNELLER DIED HERE YESTERDAY CULVER.

That was all it said, with the date and name of some place that was absolutely strange to her prefixed. And there had never been even an explanatory letter from him; nothing but a few short obituary notices in the

various papers. 'We learn from our correspondent in Uganda', or 'Latest advices from British East Africa report the death of Captain Geoffrey Kneller, 30th Lancers, who recently left for the interior in company with Lord John Culver'. One or two of them mentioned the fact that the deceased officer was taking part in an expedition after lions at the time of his death, but that was all. No information whatever came through as to the cause or manner of his sudden exit from her now desolate world.

She had gone to stay with her aunt in London, as a temporary measure until the Fleckney lawyer had settled her affairs and let her know what sort of scale she could afford to live upon. In fact, she was with her aunt when the cable arrived: she was still staying there some months later when the solitary servant-maid opened the drawing-room door of the flat in Argyll Court and announced, with a certain pride:

'Lord John Culver to see you, Miss.'

It was, without a doubt, the most painful interview that she had ever had to face. She felt she could hardly endure to look at the man. There he stood, precisely the same as he had always been, except perhaps that his face was a shade or two browner. But the eyes were the same, and the long nose, a little to one side, and precisely the same expression of face—the expression that she had always disliked so much. Except perhaps that now it looked a shade more hungry, or it might have been apologetic.

The feeling uppermost in her mind was one of rebellion against the constitution of a universe that could permit a thing like this to survive while its companion had died. But certainly Lord John looked miserable enough. She could hardly bring herself to speak, for fear she should

break down altogether, but it was she who had to begin. She could not leave him standing there interminably.

‘Won’t you sit down?’

She managed to bring it out at last, and it sounded to her frayed nerves like the voice of a stranger. What had induced him to come? It wasn’t fair to torture her like that.

‘Why have you come here?’ she breathed, almost inaudibly.

He gave a sort of shake of the shoulders, disclaiming responsibility.

‘He wanted me to,’ he said in thick tones, huskily.

‘Oh!’ The exclamation forced itself from her lips. You might have read a note of surprise in it rather than tender reminiscence. Instinctively her hand went to her left breast. ‘Why?’ She sought in her mind for some form of words. ‘If you had written to let me know,’ she murmured, and pulled herself together with an effort. ‘How did it happen?’ She managed to make the words audible.

Culver’s brows contracted. He seemed overcome with nervousness and a sort of shame. He might, by his appearance and manner, have been a criminal in the dock.

He cleared his throat.

‘Kneller wanted me to come and tell you—that it was not—exactly—my fault.’

She looked up at him with startled eyes.

‘Your fault! How could it be your fault?’

He put his hand to his throat. For a moment he hesitated. ‘I shot him accidentally,’ he said at last, and then, by way of explanation, ‘Put a bullet right through him.’

‘Oh!’ Her voice failed, dying away to a whisper of awe and incredulity. For what seemed an age they sat there in silence. She could not bring herself to look at Culver. Was



that the truth? Had there really been an accident? A whole crowd of thoughts raced through her brain. She buried her face in her hands.

'I think I'd better go.' She was just conscious of a gruff voice saying these words, but for the life of her she could not look up. She sat there, mute and unseeing, conscious only that she was alone again. And, behind it all, something in the tone of his voice oppressed her memory. It sounded so hopeless, like the voice of a lost soul.

It haunted her. And so did the look of those eyes. For some reason or other the man's face was always before her now. She did her best to banish it, but it refused to go. In a sense, it was a form of disloyalty; and she told herself every time that she did not want to think of him in the least. She hated the man. Those eyes of his, so close together, and with that curious hungry look in them. Yes, she positively hated him. Only, somehow, she could not get him out of her mind.

'I oughtn't to have let him go away like that,' she repeated to herself. 'He must have thought me horrid. All the same. . . .'

What had been the truth about that accident? She could never really be at rest now until she had found out the whole story because, of course, if—but no! it must have been purely an accident, or he would never have told her. Unless Geoffrey had understood what had happened, and wanted to save his friend. You read things like that about men, sometimes.

She sat musing before the fire, wondering whether she should write and ask him to come again. It was no use trying to deceive herself any longer. The man wanted her. He had always wanted her, badly: she saw it in those eyes of his the first time they had met—only she did not



know quite what it meant then. And now—well! it was very lonely in London. She sighed, looking at the red fire-light.

The next morning she wrote and asked if my would mind coming again the next afternoon. She would try not to be so weak this time.

And, in fact, she found it much easier to talk on his second visit, and even to look at him without wincing. It was a whole year now since it had happened, when all was said, and that did make a difference. But Lord John was still a little nervous. He rather shied away from the subject when she began.

‘I’m afraid I was weak and silly when you came last time,’ she explained, ‘but I want to know now—exactly what happened.’

Lord John’s face turned a darker red.

‘It’s true enough,’ he admitted. ‘I shot him—but it was a very tricky shot. Had to be quick, or the brute would have carried him right off.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Why, the lion had got poor old Kneller and was pulling him out through the thorns. Rotten light, too. I got the beast, but couldn’t quite see what had happened, and gave him a second barrel. It was that took poor Kneller in the lung. He died next day.’

Her face lit up.

‘You killed the lion when it was carrying him off? Then you really saved him.’

He smiled, a little grimly.

‘That’s what old Kneller said. Wanted me to come and pitch you that yarn, how I’d saved his life and he’d just died afterwards from being clawed by the beast.

Well, when it came to the point I just couldn't do it. Too thin, altogether. Bullet went right through his lung.'

She looked at him in silence, trying to visualize the scene.

'I don't quite see,' she said at last. 'I mean to say—why did he want you to—come and tell me?'

Lord John Culver seemed to find a difficulty in explaining. Perhaps Kneller had thought it would be easier for her if he told the story personally. Of course, Kneller and he were great pals. They had been about together over most parts of the habitable globe. They hadn't, in effect, many secrets.

'I expect he knew more or less how I felt.' It came at last with a good deal of difficulty. It was the tone of voice more than anything that explained this rather cryptic utterance to Maud. She found herself suddenly unable to meet his eye. For the life of her she could not look up from the ground. It was most embarrassing. For all the time there kept running in her head that old phrase of Geoffrey's about leaving Culver to her in his will if anything happened.

'I wonder what he would really wish me to do,' she said to herself.

And in the night-time, as she lay awake, thinking, all sorts of extraordinary thoughts persisted in crowding through her brain. It seemed to her that this mind of hers was no longer her own property: it was something outside herself, the prey of any stray imaginations that chanced to drift in through the open doors. Like a derelict house. It always began by her seeing Geoffrey's face, looking at her with those reddish-brown eyes of his. And then she would try to visualize the scene—not very successfully, for she had no idea of what the scenery looked like, and

besides, it must have been almost dark. But she could see Culver snatching up his gun and firing, twice. And then nothing more—except the look of his eyes as he sat opposite her in her aunt's drawing-room, ~~stammeringly~~ trying to explain.

And behind it all there kept hammering away unceasingly at her subconscious mind the thought that her aunt would be so pleased. Even at first, when they were all going about together a year or more ago, she could feel that Aunt Alice really preferred Lord John to Geoffrey. And one or two things she had said since showed even more surely. Was it the title? Or had she really misjudged the man altogether?

Yes! it had come, just as she had supposed it would all the time. Now that it was over, she felt that it had been inevitable from the start, and she had seen it, and probably that had been the cause of her original dislike. It had not really been dislike at all, but fear—a fear that she might get to like him too well—and, of course, she had wished to save Geoffrey from that. But how strange it all was! What could there be about her that caught hold of men—men of that type? John had not been nearly so self-assured as Geoffrey, though. He was terribly nervous from the start, and his voice shook. That gave her a sense of satisfaction, somehow. After all, though she was only a woman, she had Power.

And then, when she had consented (if you could call it a consent, for really she had said nothing at all) he had been extraordinarily good. She had been almost frightened at first, expecting she hardly knew what, but he had only kissed her very gently on the forehead. Geoffrey had squeezed her so hard that she had nearly fainted. The

memory of that squeeze came back to her sometimes now, and she sighed. It was all so short a time ago. But after that day Time seemed suddenly to have acquired wings and to be flying past with inconceivable rapidity. John was not satisfied with mere consent: he wanted to be married, and Aunt Alice thought it would be so much more convenient if they got it over before the Summer, and, in fact, everyone appeared to have joined in a conspiracy to hurry her into this new state as swiftly as possible. It was almost indecent, and why should there be such a hurry? She had wanted nothing but to be allowed to wait a little and look at the prospect in front of her, until it grew more familiar and less terrifying. She believed she might get quite accustomed to it in time—even staying at Culver Castle—but just at first it was alarming. And they would not even give her a few months more.

‘Musn’t be married in May, you know,’ Aunt Alice kept saying, every time she tried to hint at delay. ‘Most unlucky. Besides, what is there to wait for?’

And she had nothing to say. But a little shiver of apprehension went down her spine every time she thought of it.

Then, the night before the wedding, she fell into a regular panic. It came upon her suddenly that she had made a terrible mistake, the sort of mistake that cannot possibly be rectified afterwards—only modified, and that with extreme difficulty. I say it came upon her suddenly, but perhaps that is hardly true: it had been hanging over her for the last few days, but she had been resolute and would not allow herself to be frightened. Now, however, as she lay in bed that last night of freedom, it became more than she could bear: she was compelled to bury her face in the bed-clothes for fear someone might hear her and come to see what was the matter. Once she actually

got out of bed and put on her dressing-gown and started to go along the passage to Aunt Alice's room in order to tell her all about it. If she could only open her heart to Aunt Alice, and get her to stop the whole thing, how different the world would feel!

She could not be expected to marry a man with such eyes as Lord John Culver's.

Still, she ought, perhaps, to have thought of that before. What would he look like when he heard that she wanted to break it off? The thought of those eyes, looking at her with a sort of submissive hunger, checked her with her hand already on the china handle of the door. And then, Aunt Alice! She had always been kind, but she could not be expected to understand all she felt. And she had wanted this match: she liked John, and there was no denying it was a good' connection. Maud Sumner hesitated. The china knob slipped back again through her hand.

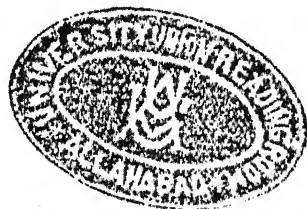
She got back into bed, with a long, broken sigh. A difficult world, but perhaps she was making it more difficult than she need. Her mother had been married, and Aunt Alice, and even one or two of her own friends, and they never had appeared to be much the worse for the experience. Indeed, it was generally held that the reproach lay in remaining unmarried. Or was that merely a convention, carefully fostered for his own ends by the cunning male?

And then suddenly she saw herself back at home in the study of the old Rectory with her father. He sat there, his long fingers interlaced, looking at her over his spectacles, gravely and a little doubtfully. And he was saying, just as he had said on that former occasion, as if it were the only thing that mattered:

'I'm afraid you won't be really happy, my child.'

Happy? But then what was happiness, anyway, and could any reasonable person expect to be really happy in this world? Especially a girl like herself, who had already been involved in so terrible a tragedy. Much if she could pick up the broken fragments of her life and patch them together somehow into the semblance of a decent comfort. And—but she felt he would be kind to her—in spite of those eyes.

She gave one more sigh, and fell asleep.



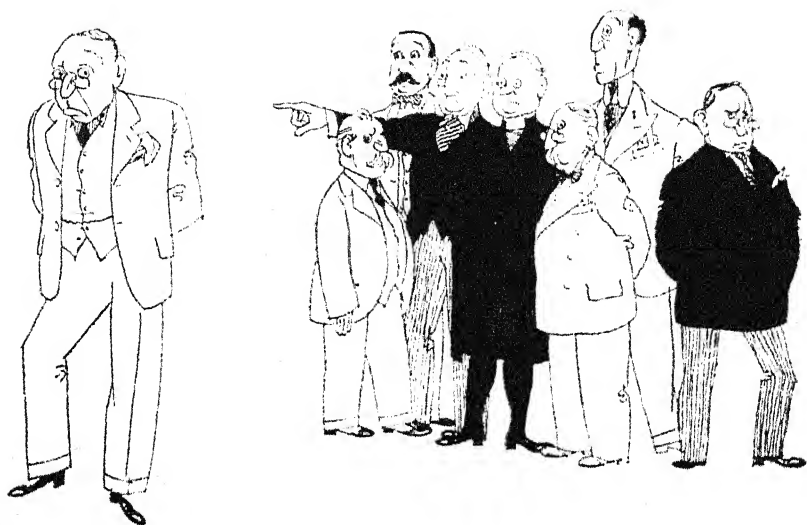


H. BELLOC

## THE EXAMPLE

*Illustrated by NICOLAS BENTLEY*

John Henderson, an Unbeliever,  
Had lately lost his Joie de Vivre  
From reading far too many books.  
He went about with gloomy looks;  
Despair inhabited his breast  
And made the man a perfect pest.  
Not so his sister, Mary Lunn,  
She had a whacking lot of fun!  
Though Unbelieving as a beast  
She didn't worry in the least.  
But drank as hard as she was able,  
And sang, and danced upon the table;  
And when she met her brother Jack  
She used to smack him on the back  
So smartly as to make him jump,  
And cry, 'What-ho! You've got the hump!'  
A phrase which, more than any other,  
Was gall and wormwood to her brother;  
For, having an agnostic mind,  
He was exceedingly refined.



The Christians, a declining band,  
Would point with monitory hand  
At Henderson his desperation,  
At Mary Lunn her dissipation,  
And often mutter, 'Mark my words!  
Something will happen to those birds!' Which came to pass: for Mary Lunn  
Died suddenly, at ninety-one,  
Of Psittacosis, not before  
Becoming an appalling bore.  
While Henderson, I'm glad to state,  
Though naturally celibate,  
Married an intellectual wife  
Who made him lead the Higher Life



And wouldn't give him any wine;  
Whereby he fell in a decline,  
And, at the time of writing this,  
Is suffering from paralysis,  
The which, unless his doctor lies,  
Can only end in his demise.

*MORAL*

The moral is (It is indeed!)  
You mustn't monkey with the Creed.

## READERS' REPORTS

*Francis Vielé-Griffin, by Jean de Cours. (Champion.)* Notes on Francis Vielé-Griffin and *La Poésie Symboliste*. It all happened, one feels, very long ago. An air of preternatural seriousness enwraps the Symbolist from birth; we are reminded of his connection with Wagner. But here he is, with all his dogmas and aspirations and his conscious virtue—ultra-romantic, yet in his attitude to the Romantics condescendingly aloof. How can the founders of a new 'school' be so much in earnest? Their theories may be better or worse, but their work, after all, can only be first rate, and that has been done before.

There is certainly something in the atmosphere of a new school of art which makes grown men behave like adolescents. Paris is favourable to this form of absurdity, and artists of all nations drift to Paris when they feel it coming on. Francis Vielé-Griffin—American by birth—did so premonitorily at eight years old. French critics have a tendency to lump English and Americans together as 'la race anglo-saxonne', but it seems clear that America is, intellectually at least, much nearer France than England, and this poet took very kindly to the change of soil. His poems are delicate and noble; but they do mention *la Vie* rather mystically and often for an English ear.

Anyone leaning to the heresy that prose rhythm is no less important than the rhythm of verse ought to consider French poetry and hesitate. We, as a nation, can get on with French prose: we can delight in all its manners, from Voltaire to Chateaubriand. When it comes to French poetry, then probably, like Matthew Arnold, we are stumped. With Spanish or Italian we feel no such

distress; French, with its variable accents, is too much for us. The Symbolists and the *vers libre* increase our doubts. Orthodox rhythms were at least a crutch on the uneven ground; we are left unsustained in an encounter with poems like those of Vielé-Griffin, 'le symboliste par excellence'.

The Symbolists were fond of declaring themselves classical. Here again, a foreigner is slightly puzzled. Take, for example, Vielé-Griffin's poetic drama, 'Phocas le Jardinier'. Phocas is an early Christian, in love with the pagan Thalia, and extremely lackadaisical about his own religion. 'Chrétien!', he murmurs to himself, 'Ces nouveaux mots sont vraiment vagues.' A natural idea, but not that of a convert, which Phocas evidently is, for he goes on to say: 'Mon Père ne connut point ce beau nom là'. However, a band of soldiers comes in search of him; the persecutions have begun. They do not know their victim, and he promises that Phocas shall be there at dawn. They drink and sleep, and Phocas waits patiently till they wake up again. He has no reason for it: he is not dying for the love of God. It is, in fact, a 'spontaneous exercise of free will'. At the last moment he reflects:

On te dira martyr et saint, mais, tu le sais,  
Que tu meurs, seulement, pour ne pas renier  
La foi du père de ton père le jardinier.

And die he does accordingly. Now Phocas might be envisaged as a 'belle âme', sensitive and intelligent, but so profoundly melancholic that he has not energy enough, at this point, to keep alive. But he is not so presented to us. He is a hero of free will, an ordinary man 'suddenly sublimated by a great idea'. This gratuitous dying—chronic among the poet's heroes—strikes one as not

merely unreal, but morally unsound, and even slightly vulgar, as all over-refinement tends to be. And if it is not essentially romantic, what is? Jean de Cours calls this tragedy Racinian; he might as well have called it a Cornelian gesture carried to the last extreme. But it is the gesture of a post-Romantic Corneille.

Consider it, however, from the symbolic point of view. Phocas, a Christian, is in love with the pagan Thalia, the pagan Joy. He sees nothing sinful in this love. But he chooses death instead of her, 'pour ne pas fléchir'. His life is ebbing when, warned of his danger, she stands there before him, and his last cry is her name. 'He who loseth his life shall find it?' Very likely: it seems to be the poet's favourite text. But if so, the allegory here is formal, the relation between fable and doctrine is distinctly cool. That is a common fault of Symbolism: we find the symbol vaporous, and the lesson chill.

'Je ne veux pas dire,' Remy de Gourmont wrote, 'que F. Vielé-Griffin soit un poète joyeux, portant il est poète de la Joie.' He describes a good circulation singing as it flows:

Que la vie est sainte et bonne,  
Que tout est juste et tout est bien.

—a thoroughly Browningsque sentiment. Like Browning, he insists on the ideal state of man as action, progress, 'l'éternel devenir'. This creed was, no doubt, epidemic—a 'scientific' view of happiness displacing the religious view, logic abandoned for experiment. Perhaps the neo-Thomists have set things right again, and we are allowed to prefer a static happiness with Dante, or its most amiable and familiar devotee Charles Lamb. But even the most resolute of poets must lament now and



then, if he is honest, the implications of the 'dynamic ideal', and Vielé-Griffin's doubtful hour is exquisitely told in *La Partenza*, a series of lyrics, pensive and half-articulate, which partly correspond in mood, though not at all in manner, to *James Lee's Wife*. 'On se prouve,' says the French poet:

Que la vie est toujours nouvelle;  
Que demain est le jour des forts . . .  
Je me souviens d'heures plus belles  
Que demain—

though this does not really reach the heart of the grievance like Browning's 'Better, so call it, only not the same'.

But there is nothing facile or robustious in Vielé-Griffin's gospel of joy. His voice is sweet and grave—'calme', said Remy de Gourmont, summing him up. His happy ones are the martyrs of 'L'Amour Sacré'.

French critics are for ever harping on 'mesure'. Vielé-Griffin himself wrote: 'Le Poète nous doit la perfection'. Charles Maurras deplores the romantic tendency to sacrifice 'la beauté' to 'les beautés'. When will we in our turn have the courage to reply: 'A bas la perfection: vivent les beautés'? Balzac was a sounder man than Flaubert, and a greater novelist; Dickens was a sounder man and a greater novelist than Henry James. And would we really rather have Racine than Shakespeare? If we are barbarous, let us make the most of it; let us leave the anæmic and the literary their meticulous 'mesure'. But, alas, we seem to be slipping the other way: we have taken to naming Pope with Milton again.

## THE EDITOR

NOTES ON NEW AND  
FORTHCOMING BOOKS

The Spring Publishing Season brings many new books to market, and one asks oneself, which shall I buy or borrow? When a book is already out, reviews or other people's comments are some guide, but among books which are only announced how can we distinguish? Yet it is important to know what is coming out. One may easily miss a review, or one may order an inferior book on the same subject, having heard only of that.

When I was Literary Editor of the *New Statesman*, three or four times a year it was my perplexing task to read through publishers' announcements (they increased in number every year), and to make a Selected List of the books which I supposed might interest our readers. Sometimes I would include a book because I admired another book by the same author, or had heard or read his praises; sometimes because the subject was interesting, and I could imagine a good book being written about it; sometimes because a good publisher obviously set store by it; sometimes because the author was popular, though I myself thought nothing of him. I tried to turn myself into a reader with no preferences, or, rather, with so many that it amounted to having none. It was the most irksome task connected with editing. It could never be done quite satisfactorily. Yet one was rewarded for the pains one had forced oneself to take by discovering that the lists were

kept by people who marked the books that appealed to them, and that booksellers who had not yet concluded their purchases referred to them.

Now it is impossible to give readers of *Life and Letters* a list of that kind. It would take too many pages, and they have already those of the weekly papers. What I have tried to do here is to make the kind of list I used to make for my own use *out of the longer ones*. But since I cannot suppose that all readers of *Life and Letters* share my sense of proportion, I have also asked the opinions of others on the choice of books. Hardly any novels are included, because it is usually impossible to guess at their merits, and only a very small percentage of memoirs and biographies and travel books, for the same reason.

The list is that of a literary man with a desultory interest in history, philosophy, and in sciences such as anthropology, psychology, archæology, which are apt to interest the literary minded. Books which everyone will hear of have been omitted: such books, for example, as *The Life and Letters of Edmund Gosse*, by Evan Charteris (Heinemann). Notes are in many cases appended to explain why a particular book may be worth reading. In some cases I have seen an advance copy, or the book has appeared just before going to press, or I have heard that which made me look forward to it.

*Afterthoughts*, by Logan Pearsall Smith. (Constable. 3s. 6d.)

Many of them have appeared in *Life and Letters*. While the perfection of their form has delighted the literary, the shrewdness of the comments on human nature and social life has amused many who do not consider themselves particularly fastidious.

*The Prison, by H. B. Brewster, with a Memoir of the author by Ethel Smyth. (Heinemann. 6s.)*

This is a philosophical dialogue on life and religion, which was published privately during the author's lifetime. It appealed to the Irish mystic and poet Æ, and it is remarkable for the dignity and sincerity of its eloquence. To those in tune with Brewster's conception of life it may well become a favourite book.

*Poems of Blake, chosen and edited by Laurence Binyon. (Macmillan. 7s. 6d.)*

The merit of this selection is that it is much fuller than previous ones. It includes numerous selections from the prophetic books, and 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', which places Blake among the greatest poetical aphorists, and a selection of his light and savage epigrams. Mr. Binyon's introduction is admirable.

*The Sale of St. Thomas, in Six Acts, by Lascelles Abercrombie. (Secker. 15s.)*

This is a fine edition of a remarkable poem, a fragment of which, published in the first volume of Georgian Poets, did much to establish Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie's fame as a poet. The Oxford Press have also published recently a complete edition of his poems in their series of English Poets (6s.), an honour seldom accorded to the living. His poetry is akin in some respects to the Elizabethans; in others to Browning. It is complex, ardent, metaphorical and dramatic; energetic in phrase, and sustained by a lofty and personal philosophy.

*The New World Architecture, by Sheldon Cheney. 389 illustrations. (Longmans. 42s.)*

Fascinating to look at and instructive to read.

*Strafford, by Lady Burghclere. Two vols. (Macmillan. 30s.)*

Contains much new material, and makes full use of the old. Of the three great figures of the Civil War, Charles I, Cromwell, and Strafford, Strafford's is the least distinct to most readers, though his personality was extraordinarily attractive, vigorous, and marked.

*Dr. Watson, by G. S. Roberts. (Faber & Faber. 1s.)*

Many read the Sherlock Holmes stories for Dr. Watson's sake. Mr. Roberts brings to the problems and contradictions of 'the canon' that balanced acumen which is usually shown only in the discussion of important but obscure historical figures. That is *his* fun and ours. An extremely amusing pamphlet for hobbyists.

*A Searchlight on America, by J. T. Adams. (Routledge. 12s. 6d.)*

One of the characteristics of modern America which is apt to escape our notice is the unsparing criticism that Americans are applying to their country and its institutions. This book is a lively and comprehensive commentary on the United States, and since it is impossible to understand our age without understanding America, it is a book of interest to us.

*Proust, by Samuel Beckett. (The Dolphin Books, Chatto & Windus. 2s.)*

An admirable commentary, discriminating and well written. We have heard enough gossip about Proust himself. This is a study of his mind and his work.

*Lockhart's Literary Criticism, with Introduction and Bibliography, by M. Clive Hildyard. (Basil Blackwood. 6s.)*

This was a book well worth compiling, and therefore

well worth reading for those who have leisure and inclination to read criticism of the past. What strikes us is (1) How excellently (in a formal way) Lockhart wrote; (2) How harsh and often mistaken he was in his judgments; (3) How formidable and amusing the comments of a man of the world can be, who has a powerful intellect and faith in tradition as interpreted by the conventions and common sense of his own age.

*Mr. Line*, by L. A. Pavey. (Peter Davies. 7s. 6d.)

This is a curious and original study of the suburban life of an obscure Civil Service clerk. It is an attempt to get close to the texture of experience, of life as it is subjectively felt. This is so subtly and honestly achieved that the result reveals what is universal and not merely peculiar to the hero's predicament. It is a modest piece of work, but it achieves a good deal.

*The Works of Tolstoy*. (Oxford Press Centenary Edition. 21 vols. £8 9s.)

The latest additions are the first volume of *War and Peace* and *Resurrection*. Both are translated by Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer Maude. This is the complete edition of Tolstoy which a good library should possess.

*Simpson*, by Edward Sackville-West. (Heinemann. 7s. 6d.)

The story of a nurse's life, of a woman with a vocation for looking after and loving other people's children. It is considered the best novel that the author has yet written, and to be among the most remarkable of recent novels.

*Son of Woman: the Life of D. H. Lawrence*, by Middleton Murry. (Cape. 12s. 6d.)

A book which will certainly be read, and discussed.



*The Architect of the Roman Empire*, by T. Rice Holmes.  
(Oxford Press. 12s. 6d.)

Thirty-two years have passed since Dr. Holmes (already an historian of repute) published his first volume on Julius Cæsar. This history of the reign of Augustus completes his account of the foundation of the Empire—a fine piece of sustained labour.

*Keats's Letters* (Oxford Press. 36s.) at last appear in a complete, and no doubt final, edition by Mr. M. D. Buxton Forman. The text has been re-collated: new pieces included—the letters now number 230—and the whole submitted to careful editorial examination. These two volumes will be the basis of all future work on Keats's life and ideas.

*Prince Jali*, by L. H. Myers. (Cape. 7s. 6d.)

This is a continuation of Mr. Myers's remarkable novel, *The Near and the Far*.

*Edward Carpenter: an Appreciation by his Friends*, edited by Gilbert Beith. (Allen & Unwin. 7s. 6d.)

Includes contributions from Ramsay MacDonald, G. Lowes Dickinson, E. M. Forster, Havelock Ellis.

*The Bab Ballads*, by W. S. Gilbert. (Hutchinson. 10s. 6d.; and paper, 6s.)

Author's illustrations; tunes by A. Weller Beecham.

*Binstead Omnibus Volume*. (Werner Laurie. 7s. 6d.)

'Pitcher!' The last of Bohemian journalists with Elizabethan-cum-Regency gusto! The last writer to quote Horace and make jokes about drawers.

*Charles Reade, by Malcane Elwin. (Cape. 12s. 6d.)*

There have been two biographies of Charles Reade hitherto, neither satisfying. Yet Reade was a most interesting, erratic, vivid, and virile character.

*A Second Elizabethan Journal, by G. B. Harrison. (Constable. 24s.)*

Mr. G. B. Harrison covers the years from 1594 to 1598. It is a compilation, but an authentic compilation gathered from contemporary sources and scrupulously set down in their own words; if a Londoner of the time had known what would interest us and had put it all down in his diary, the result would have been very much like this.

*Bulwer: a Panorama, 1803-1836, by Michael Sadleir. (16s.)*

Between Lady Caroline, and Miss Wheeler, Parliament and Fleet Street, a few friends and a number of particularly venomous enemies, Bulwer contrived to live an exceptionally full life. At thirty-three, when Mr. Sadleir leaves him, he was the most popular of living novelists. He still had time to become the most popular dramatist, a Cabinet Minister and a peer. A remarkable story which has fallen into competent hands.

*Constable's Letters to Leslie*, which were used in part for Leslie's biography, have been printed in full by Leslie's grandson (Constable), with an introduction by Sir Charles Holmes.

*The Huskisson Papers, edited by Lewis Melville. (Constable. 21s.)*

Huskisson was the most modern statesman of the Regency period. This book may help to restore him to the place he held in contemporary regard, and from which he has rather unaccountably lapsed.

*The Diabolical Principle* (7s. 6d.) and *Hitler* (6s.), both by Mr. Wyndham Lewis (*Chatto & Windus*), are certain to be vigorous, original, and provocative.

*A Book of Essays*, by Lytton Strachey (*Chatto & Windus*. 6s.), contains the latest, and some of the most characteristic, productions of Mr. Strachey's talent. Some of them will be known to readers of *Life and Letters*.

*Hartley Coleridge: Poet's son and poet*, by Herbert Hartman (about 220 pp.), 6 plates. (*Oxford*. 15s.)

Hartley Coleridge is a subject for an article rather than a book. Bagehot has written well upon him (*Literary Studies*), treating him as one 'who lost the race he never tried to run', inherited a gleam of his father's genius and all his weakness. The value of this biography must depend (1) on its literary quality (2) on the new light it may throw on Coleridge himself, on the Wordsworths, Lamb, and Southey. It is a minor subject. Hartley Coleridge was a surprising talker, a lovable, wayward, sensitive character, permanently ashamed of his own failure and distressingly difficult to help. He drank, and wrote a little. The biographer promises us new letters and poems.

*Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, Vol. XVI. Collected by H. J. C. Grierson. (*Oxford*. 7s. 6d.)

The volumes of this series always contain good work. Lecturers and conscientious reviewers find them good to steal from. This volume includes a paper on Classical and English Verse-Structure by R. C. Trevelyan, who is one of the few poets who write intelligibly on the intricate subject of metre, and two papers on Donne: one is by that learned young scholar, John Sparrow.

*Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, by W. W. Greg. 2 vols. (Oxford. 63s.)

Dr. Greg is an authority on English drama and a researcher of high repute. Probably not a book for the general reader, but one indispensable to scholars and all who aim at having instructed opinions on Shakespeare or kindred problems.

*Johnson and Boswell: A Tour to the Hebrides*, edited by R. W. Chapman. (Oxford. 3s. 6d.)

It comprises Johnson's *Journey* and Boswell's *Journal*. This edition is desirable because Mr. Chapman is an excellent editor, and because it is an advantage to have the two books bound together. You can also purchase them bound up with Boswell's *Johnson*: Oxford, India Paper, 18s.

*Collected Essays and Papers of Robert Bridges, Vol. V*, by George Darley. (Oxford. 2s. 6d.)

All Robert Bridges' criticism is excellent, and his prose is perfect.

*Poetry and the Criticism of Life*, by H. W. Garrod. (Oxford. 8s. 6d.)

(Reprinted Lectures.) Mr. Garrod is Professor of Poetry at Oxford. His criticism is weighty with the learning behind it. He conveys a great deal in a few sentences.

*The Human Parrot*, by Montgomery Belgion. (Oxford. 10s. 6d.)

Mr. Belgion, author of *Our Present Philosophy of Life* (Faber & Faber) is a brilliant critic of ideas. He analysed acutely in his former book the thought of Bernard Shaw,

Bertrand Russell, André Gide. He is over-argumentative sometimes, and too anxious to score; but he is adept at exposing inconsistencies. He knows modern French thinkers as intimately as English thinkers. He proposes to examine here the theories of criticism of I. A. Richards and the cosmologies of Whitehead and Sir James Jeans and M. Maritain (the French Catholic critic).

*After Sixty Years*, by Shan Bullock. (Sampson Low. 8s. 6d.)

Sir Horace Plunkett assures us that this book gives an excellent picture of Irish life in the 'seventies and 'eighties.

*Circus Nights and Circus Days*, by A. H. Kober. (Sampson Low. 12s. 6d.)

Circus life is nearly always interesting, witness the immortal book of Lord George Sanger. Dr. Kober, the German author, has travelled all over the world with 400 animals and 500 human beings.

*French Novelists from the Revolution to Proust*, by Frederick C. Green. (Dent. 7s. 6d.)

An excellent book of analytical criticism and literary history, which continues Professor Green's study of French novelists from the Renaissance to the Revolution.

*Seven Murderers*, by Christmas Humphreys. (Heinemann. 12s. 6d.)

The cases have been taken from the documents lent to the author by the Director of Public Prosecutions. They are more interesting than a detective story, and nearly as exciting—though they are not selected for their sensational appeal, but as examples of how our laws of evidence work in murder cases.

*Life of the Empress Eugénie*, by Robert Sencourt. (Benn. 21s.)

This is the work of an admirer and a well-read one. It is likely to entertain memoir-readers, especially of the older generation.

*Adjustments*, by I. R. G. Hart. (Benn. 7s. 6d.)

A curious book which is the story of two sisters, one of whom defrauds the other of money. The injured sister is aware of it. The author's aim is to show two human beings with different ways of taking life, *adjusting* themselves to each other—and to facts by distorting facts unconsciously. The reader meanwhile sees the truth.

*O World Invisible: an Anthology of Religious Poetry*, compiled by Edward Thompson. (Benn. 6s.)

The anthologist has followed the example of Robert Bridges in *The Spirit of Man*: he has put a list of the authors names with notes at the end, so that the reader has a chance of judging the poems unbiassed by the prestige of the writer. The selection is a short, but original, one.

*Essays of a Catholic*, by H. Belloc. (Sheed & Ward. 7s. 6d.)

An orientation of Catholicism in regard to science, history, English politics, the Church of England, and modern psychological climates. Sure to be interesting to Protestants and sceptics as well as to Catholics.

*St. Thomas Aquinas*, by Jacques Maritain. (Sheed & Ward. 7s. 6d.)

M. Maritain is the leading Thomist in modern France, and he has considerable influence as a critic.

*Richard Burton*, by Fairfax Downey. (Scribner. 10s. 6d.)

Sir Richard Burton's wife, his niece, and Mr. Thomas



Wright have written lives of him. Each life, for different reasons, left much to be desired. Burton is so interesting and romantic a nineteenth-century figure that this announcement is worth noting. It may be better than the others.

*John Deth*, by Conrad Aiken. (Scribner. 10s. 6d.)

A whimsical, macabre, violent, and ultra-modern poem.

*The Lonely Plough* (*The World's Classics*), by Constance Holme. (Milford. 2s.)

These are studies of rural life; few living authors are included in this excellent series. The editors must be confident that it is an exceptional book.

*The Diary of a Country Parson*, by Rev. James Woodforde. Edited by John Beresford. Vol. V and last. (Oxford. 12s. 6d.)

*Echoes of Causes Célèbres*, by Arthur Lambton. (Hurst & Blackett. 12s. 6d.)

Mr. Arthur Lambton is the founder of 'The Crime Club'.

*J. M. W. Turner*, by Walter Bayes. (Geoffrey Bles. 15s.)

Mr. Walter Bayes is a sound art critic of much experience. He proposes to treat Turner's art as transition art (eighteenth to the nineteenth century); and biographically to draw a parallel by contrasting his Hogarthian side with his Victorian respectability.

*Prometheus and Epimetheus*, by Carl Spitteler. (Jarrold. 7s. 6d.)

Spitteler is a Swiss poet and essayist, born 1845; won

the Nobel prize, 1919. He is hardly known yet in England, and we might try the prose of one who is held abroad to be one of the greatest living poets.

*The Revolutionary Idea in France, 1789-1817*, by Godfrey Elton. (Arnold. 5s.)

A cheap edition of a good book.

*The Scientific Detective and the Expert Witness*, by C. Ainsworth Mitchell, D.Sc., F.I.C. (Heffer. 3s. 6d.)

This should be interesting in view of the popularity of detective fiction and the constant discussion of juries' verdicts in conversation.

*Colonel Hawker's Shooting Diaries*. (Philip Allen. 21s.)

The author of *Instructions to a Young Sportsman* is a classic writer in his own line. The introduction by Mr. Eric Parker will give an account of the Squire of Longparish.

*Bird Life in England*, by John Kearton. (Philip Allen. 12s. 6d.)

The photographs are sure to be excellent, and the text that of a first-rate observer.

*From Surtees to Sassoon*, by Harvey Darton. (Morley and Michell Kennerley. 7s. 6d.)

An appreciation of English hunting literature.

*Whistler: the Friend*, by Elizabeth Pennell. (Lippincott. 10s. 6d.)

She was co-author of *The Life of Whistler*. It will deal at greater length with his youth.

*Landscape in English Art and Poetry*, by Laurence Binyon. (Cobden Sanderson. 7s. 6d.)

It treats the development of 'landscape' in both arts,

not technically, but as symptomatic of a changing imaginative attitude towards nature.

*Silver Ley*, by Adrian Bell. (Cobden Sanderson. 7s. 6d.)

The author's novel, *Corduroy*, was one of the best books about country life I have read. The subject of this story is going to be the gradual disruption of rural life.

*An Edwardian Year*, by Maurice Lewin. (Peter Davies. 10s. 6d.)

This should be entertaining. The author has taken a cross-section through the whole of English life in the year 1906, just long enough ago to combine the pleasure of recollection and novelty.

*Scandal and Credulity of John Aubrey*, by Mr. J. Collier. (Peter Davies. 8s. 6d.)

The standard edition of Aubrey's *Lives*, by Clarke, was a fine, but for many readers, heavy piece of work. Aubrey played over the surface of the seventeenth century, but he had an eye for character, and he gives the best picture we have of the daily doings of an age which was really much less concerned with the weightier matters of the law than the historians suggest.

*Pyramid and Temple*, by Julius Meyer Graefe. (Cape. 18s.)

Meyer Graefe is one of the most sensitive and enthusiastic observers living, and his æsthetic journal is sure to be subtle, original and vivid.

*Sir Francis Burdett and His Times*, by M. W. Patterson. (Macmillan. 30s.)

It is impossible to go far in the early nineteenth century without encountering Burdett, who cut a remarkable

figure as an upper-class Radical when Radicalism was dangerous as well as unpopular. A good biography will be a substantial addition to our knowledge of nineteenth-century England.

*Thomas Hardy: a Critical Study*, by Arthur McDowall. (Faber. 15s.)

By a small circle Mr. McDowall's unsigned work is always recognized and always appreciated. His signed books are rare, and so much the more welcome.

*The Prospects of Humanism*, by Laurence Hyde. (Howe. 10s. 6d.) is the sequel to *The Learned Knife*, a book in which some good judges saw evidence of uncommon originality and philosophic acumen.

*Our Fathers*, by Alan Bott (Heinemann) can be taken as a work of entertainment or a source book for history, as it contains pictures reprinted from the *Graphic*, 1870 to 1890, with explanatory text.

*A Three-quarter Length Portrait of Michael Arlen*, by Osbert Sitwell, with a preface by the author in which the object of the book is explained (Heinemann), is a title which will whet more appetites than a limited edition can satisfy.

*Philip Sidney*, by Mona Wilson (Duckworth. 12s. 6d.), is the first biography in which equal weight is given to Sidney's career as a public servant, and his significance as pioneer and patron of literature.

*Mesopotamia*, by Arnold Wilson. (Oxford Press. 25s.)

This sequel to the widely-read *Loyalties* completes the

chequered story of the Middle East during the war, and the making of peace.

*Greek Cities in Italy and Sicily*, by Randall MacIver. (Oxford Press. 15s.)

This is the book I should take if I had the good fortune to be packing for a holiday in the Mediterranean next May.

*Tables Turned*, by J. Bonar (Macmillan. 7s. 6d.), sounds as if it might be highly entertaining, as well as learned. The classical economists are not easy reading. Mr. Bonar, who knows them thoroughly, brings them on to the scene in imaginary conversations.

*American Tramp and Underworld Slang*, by Geoffrey Irwin. Partridge. 900 copies. (Scholartis Press. 10s. 6d.)

There ought to be some shattering phrases for word-lovers in this!

*Grosse's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, edited by Eric Partridge. (Scholartis Press. Between £1 10s. and £2.)

A remarkable and rare book.

*The Collected Ghost-Stories*, by Dr. M. R. James. (Arnold. 8s. 6d.)

The most welcome of 'omnibuses'! It will contain also five new stories.

*Morals and Western Religion*, by Professor Laird of Aberdeen University. (Arnold. 7s. 6d.)

A dialogue. Ought to be learned, lively and lucid.

*Byron*, by Charles du Bos. (Putnams. 21s.)

This book has real merit and interest as a psychological study. It was written before Miss Mayne's *Life of Lady Byron*, and it is not quite up to date in its information, but its important conclusions are sound.

*Richard the Lion-heart*, by Rhoda Power. (Putnams. 3s. 6d.)

Good popular history.

*Contraception: Its Theory, History and Practice*, by Dr. Marie Stopes. Revised enlarged edition. (Putnams. 15s.)

An important book. Preface by Sir William Bayliss, F.R.S., and notes by Sir James Barr, M.D., Dr. Rolleston, and Dr. Jane Hawthorne.

*The Contemporary Mind*, by J. W. N. Sullivan. (Toulmin. About 8s. 6d.)

Interviews with the foremost living interpreters of science, and Mr. Sullivan's conclusions therefrom.

*Social Behaviour in Insects*, by A. D. Imms, F.R.S. (Methuen. 3s. 6d.)

Besides giving an outline of a subject on which many people take an ignorant interest, the author discusses comparisons between insect behaviour and human social systems. It is reassuring to have these comparisons drawn by a man of science, and not a poet or a sociologist.

*Sand and the Blue Moss*, by Edward Charles. (Peter Davies. 7s. 6d.)

*The Blue Moss* was sent to *Life and Letters* in manuscript. It is an extraordinarily interesting study of madness,



which makes the reader aware how deep is the gulf, but how narrow the partition between the mad and sane. It is admirably written. Only the fact that *Life and Letters* had recently printed two studies in madness prevented me from devoting a whole number to it.

*The Man Who Died*, by D. H. Lawrence. Limited Edition. (Martin Secker. £1 1s.)

This is one of the last stories which he wrote. This limited edition is sure to increase in value.

*The Wave*, by Virginia Woolf. (Hogarth Press. 7s. 6d.)

*Everyman's Encyclopædia*. 12 vols. (Dent. 5s. 6d. each.)

The volumes are the Everyman size; the type is clear. It is founded on Dent's old *Encyclopædia*. Most convenient book of reference.

*The Stars in Their Courses*, by Sir James Jeans. (Cambridge Press. 5s.)

*The Early Age of Greece*, Vol. II, by the late Sir William Ridgeway. (Cambridge Press. 30s.)

*The Place Names of Devon*, by A. Mawer, J.E.B. Gover, and F. M. Stenton. (Cambridge Press. 40s.)

Perhaps these hardly belong to a literary man's list. But the subjects and the authors together are a guarantee that all three will be scholarly and entertaining. Sir James Jeans is a brilliant expositor; Sir William Ridgeway was always original; the publications of the Place Names

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Society have given a new interest to Bradshaw and the Ordnance Map. For the same reason I will close my list with two other books on science.

*Life: Outlines of General Biology*, by Sir Arthur Thomson and Professor Patrick Geddes. (Williams & Norgate. 2 vols. £3 3s.)

*New Discoveries Relating to the Antiquity of Man*, by Sir Arthur Keith. (Williams & Norgate. £1 1s.)



*To the Editor of Life and Letters.*

Sir.—Your contributor, Mr. G. M. Young, has the right to attack me as violently as he pleases, but not to misrepresent me as grossly as he does in this typical sentence of his philippic against my book, *The Victorian Tragedy*:

‘He nowhere defines a bourgeois, but his idea of one can be elicited from pages 126 to 128, where it will be found to include Napoleon, Samuel Smiles, Sainte Beuve and Matthew Arnold, and to exclude Dr. Stratford and Christ.’

Arnold and Smiles I grant him, but the rest is entirely the product of your contributor’s imagination.

The only reference to Napoleon in the pages in question is one *en passant* to his well-known definition of genius. How this proves Napoleon a bourgeois baffles comprehension, unless Mr. Young argues:

1. Genius, according to Napoleon, is a faculty of taking pains.
2. The British middle class, by my admission, did take lots of pains.
3. Therefore Napoleon was a member of the British middle class.

As for Sainte Beuve, I merely happened to refer to Arnold’s having admired his painstaking habits, as he might have admired those of King Bruce of Scotland. Sainte Beuve’s social status is not determined by what Arnold happened to admire in him.

The only reference to Christ is one to His precept ‘be ye perfect’ as ‘the first great commandment to every artist’. What this has to do with class, Heaven and Mr. Young alone know.

As for the reference to myself, I cannot imagine what induced Mr. Young to make it. Nowhere, by the remotest implication, have I claimed or disclaimed membership of any social class, or attempted to inflict my private affairs on my readers.

Surely, Sir, it is not cricket to pillory an author for nonsense he has never dreamed of uttering, and for snobbery of which he is perfectly innocent. As a matter of ordinary fair play, I hope you will do me the courtesy of publishing this denial on point of fact. It is in no sense an attempt to reply to Mr. Young’s criticism, much as I should like to do so.—I am, Sir,

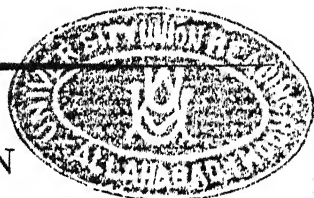
Your obedient servant,

ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

# LIFE AND LETTERS

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J. A. H. OGDON



## BERLIOZ: THE EARLIER PHASE

### I

What Mendelssohn detested and what Schumann acclaimed continues, after so many years, to be detested by antagonists and acclaimed by admirers: the Berlioz enigma does not resolve itself. No other division of musical opinion is like this one; all those who do not like Wagner—omitting only a very few—are able to confess a greatness which they cannot realize; but to Berlioz this greatness is disallowed by the intransigents to his music, they find only an infructuously noisy Romantic. The pro-Berliozians, complementing their numerical weakness by strength of opinion, arise and cite the beauty of his melody, the quality of his harmony, the effectiveness of his orchestration—and their opponents are entirely unconvinced. The impasse remains. Even his treatment of Weber's 'Invitation to the Dance'—a purely occasional piece, of great charm—has been held up as evidence against him. The issue of the controversy is that it must be shelved as insoluble: it is a matter of taste; a stimulus has been presented, and in some instances has evoked sympathetic response, in others it has failed to achieve any

reaction, or the reaction has proved strongly negative—and so, quite clearly, it remains to determine the nature of that stimulus and its reactions; unfortunately, the way of determination has been to hold up melody, harmony, and orchestration for scrutiny: this is to confuse the form with the function; to explain the discrepancy by arraighning the 'subjectivity' of the composer is an additional laxity—and an ugly one, reference should be equally to the subjective preferences and antagonisms of critics. In the Berlioz controversy the following points are of particular interest: the intensity of the preferences and nauseations involved; the protracted nature of the controversy as distinguished from other controversies, the discovery and collation of *Boris* is an exiguity beside this; the literary and dramatic factors which are bound to be considered; the two phases of the work of Berlioz, with 1850 (approximately) the year of demarcation.

It is much to be regretted that an æsthetic founded on the psychology of the instincts is not widely disseminated among those engaged variously in and about the Arts: the knowledge of some experimental work of a few investigators has been partially diffused, but the teaching of McDougall is directed mainly upon the social sciences, and the work of Freud and Adler is best known in the field of pathology; in a general sense, the function of Art may be considered as affording scope to the instincts by way of a constructional activity of the mind: in music the composer is the agent, his work the agency, and his audience the reagents. When the 'instinctive-emotional' element is paramount, the work is often termed 'subjective', and when the constructional activity of the mind (and cognitive element) predominates, the work is classed as 'objective'—but I am inclined to think that both terms

are likely to be misconstrued. The critic is usually considered as a kind of signpost, but he is also a constructor in a related medium, and interesting for his own sake. Many people who take music simply as a pleasure have their choices in critics, disliking Mr. Zed, who seems to have been born desiccated, and warming to Mr. Wye, who convinces them of their own opinions which they had yet been unable to form and express: such unformed opinions or leanings have instinctive bases. With the progress of civilization the primitive instincts, especially the more vital ones, are depressed and delimited in their scope—Art then becomes itself more vital as one of the means by which the instincts express themselves. The doctrine of the instincts which is most widely accepted by English-speaking peoples is that propounded by McDougall in the quasi-popular *Social Psychology*, a work which, with a new edition almost annually since 1908, has profoundly modified the aims and methods of the social sciences. In the arts there is a tendency to seek the bases as propounded in the writings of Freud, Jung, and Adler, particularly in the field of the *unconscious*; and the reason for this is not obscure: McDougall's is a psychology and philosophy in one; its broad tendency is toward social 'betterment'—which, in Art, implies 'uplift', and these two have been on bad terms this many a day; but it is noteworthy that in the human organism instinctive action is adaptable to circumstances—in the event of an obstructed conation the instinct co-operates with the intelligence (that is, *consciously*) to circumvent the obstruction. McDougall defines instinct as 'an innate or inherited psycho-physical disposition which determines its possessor to perceive and to pay attention to objects of a certain class, to experience an emotional excitement of a particular quality upon



perceiving such an object, and to act in regard to it in a particular manner, or, at least, to experience an impulse to such action'. All human conduct is based *ultimately* upon the instincts, there are a dozen of them; their activation is from a source of energy called 'hormic' energy, which is said to be a common fund; each instinct has its characteristic mode of affective experience—its emotion. This is a very important fact, and one often overlooked: it is a commonplace to refer to a composer as 'emotional'—it is not at all usual to refer to the instincts underlying the emotions, but the fact is that a composer is fully understood only when his auditor can bring to the hearing something of those instinctive bases which went into the composition of the music and underlie the emotionalism to which facile reference is so often made; rarely, indeed, can a critic write sympathetically and with obvious sincerity of Tchaikovsky *and* Brahms, of Berlioz *and* Mendelssohn; a critic of genuine catholicity is very rare. Critics, like composers, are of two chief sorts: when in a composer's work the emotional element tends to predominate, he is termed romantic; when the cognitive element tends to predominate, he is classic. There is, however, another feature to be noted, which may be called change of taste on the one hand, or change of style on the other—the Chopin-Liszt pianist turning Beethoven-Brahms, a very usual progress; several years ago (1921, I believe) correspondents in the *Musical Times* gave their experiences of this feature. The explanation is to be sought in the nature of the instincts and their emotions: a composer is *originally* romantic or classic according to the innate relative strength or weakness of his instincts as related also to the constructional urge; a romantic *becomes* classic through emotional decay: the central affective

part of instinctive process is believed to be situate in the basal ganglia of the brain and to act upon the viscera, which fall into decay naturally with oncoming age—thus without a suspicion of a pun we may say that the bowels of a romantic govern his head, and the head of a classic governs his bowels: the decay of the emotions corroborates the cognitive (or 'intellectual') factor.

For several years there has been a strong corpus of opinion that art is sex-derived, nor has this opinion lacked an accumulation of facts in support of it: many works of art are clearly saturated with sex, others conceal this impelling factor very cleverly, and the factor itself, which we may, for the sake of clarity, call the 'reproductive urge'—thus ridding ourselves of the Garboes and Bankys connoted in 'sexual urge'—is originally the strongest of motives, and its emotion the most intense of all. But though it is quite plain to see that *Tristan* is of sex all compact, who would be so rash as to find this principle underlying the 'Forty-Eight' or impregnating a symphony of Brahms? There are other motives than that of sex. In his chapter on the instincts and emotions of man, McDougall gives priority of place to the instinct of flight and concealment, with its characteristic emotion of fear. It is usual to speak of *flight* and concealment, but it is to be noted that the concealment is often immediate, that is, without the mediation of flight: day-old chickens will squat down at once on hearing a shrill whistle, so will rabbits; wild birds, on the approach of a hawk, at once lie low and say nothing. The function of this instinct is to preserve the organism from destruction; this impulse to self-preservation is of enormous value to any organism, but in the civilized state, where perhaps the need for such preservation is not so strong, the instinct is quite unduly

despised and repressed: one need only mention white livers and white feathers to indicate the general trend of such repression.

With scant respect for the use of terms many people characterize fear as morbid, but since morbid means diseased and since the impulse to preservation is of great benefit to any organism, we must admit that, excepting instances of genuinely morbid hypertrophy and of intense hypochondria, the proper functioning of this instinct is anything but morbid. In civilization, however, it is something of a liability to its possessor, who cannot give it anything like its due outlet without incurring, at the very least, severe social disapprobation of his attitude; to complicate matters, the instinct in any one person does not function uniformly, nor yet alone—thus in one set of circumstances the person may behave ‘abominably’, while in another and more difficult set of circumstances the same person is likely to carry things through in a quite exemplary manner. A dammed instinct is like a dammed flood—it will find a satisfactory outlet somewhere, or it will issue in a destructive spate; one satisfactory outlet is to be found in the arts, but that is not an outlet which is suitable to everyone, it requires an innate capacity for the production of such works of art—whatever the type—and these innate capacities do not grow on hedges. Nor is that the only consideration; for such art, in whatever medium, to ‘carry’ and establish itself, there will be required a body of auditors (in the case of music) to receive what the composer has produced, the difference being that this body is primarily receptive, whereas the composer is primarily creative, the action and reaction being for a common benefit which is wrongly termed ‘pleasure’: pleasure is not the aim and end, it is a *concomitant* of the

successful issue; this feature may perhaps be clarified by the instance of those types of persons who find themselves in a state of supreme pleasure only amid such harrowing circumstances as will reduce them to torrents of tears.

From what has now been written it will be quite clear that fear-derived musical art is likely to present strongly original features, it will be absolutely *sui generis*; it will differ widely from the extensive tract of sex-derived art, moving towards an entirely different end, and providing only one nexus, the medium—'tone'; also it will differ from 'pure' constructional art—the exclusive admirers of either sort will find little satisfaction in the other. Newman has written in an illuminating essay on Berlioz: 'His mind was cast in a mould of its own. He is about the only composer in the history of music who can be said to have proceeded from no one and to have been followed by no one'. Discounting a trace of hyperbole, we should agree with this opinion. Normally in the human kind the instincts and emotions work in groups, so also in their artistic expressions; but the emotion of fear seems to get along best with scant reference to co-existent emotions; it could not, however, exist quite alone—that would be a psycho-physical impossibility.

The protective impulse of fear is to preserve an organism from destruction: the most intense kind of fear is horror, and the ultimate form of destruction is death—so there exist an ultimate and intense fear and an ultimate destruction; the form of art which takes these as its field is termed the macabre, a name which may derive from that of an old painter, and should strictly be delimited to the rondo upon which mediæval artists and craftsmen lavished strong imagination. In literature the supreme example of the macabre, in the wider sense, is 'The Case of

M. Valdemar' of Edgar Allan Poe, in prose; in verse certain poems of Beddoes, and with them I should couple the 'Urn Burial' of Sir Thomas Browne, done in a quite different style and mood. In music, the supreme example is the 'Fantastic Symphony' of Hector Berlioz, with Tchaikovsky's 'Symphony in B Minor' as another type, not parallel to Browne's 'Urn Burial'. The macabre will be found to be fundamental to the most characteristic work of the early Berlioz, but other bases will also be found as auxiliaries.

## II

Of the other bases of the music of Berlioz, by far the most important, and for him the most unfortunate, is the instinct of display or self-assertion with its emotion of elation: McDougall treats it sixth in order, but anyone may see it for himself in the general attitude of a gaily plumaged cock towards his more soberly clad consorts; among human beings, it takes its *extreme* form in the mental disease known as megalomania. This innate impulse to display has been noted by most writers on Berlioz—thus, in his study of the composer, Masson states: 'La passion de la gloire semble être encore plus forte en lui que la passion de l'art. . . . Il songe à se produire au moins autant qu'à produire'. Mendelssohn was struck by his 'colossal vanity'—by way of contrast the others called him Papa Jollity. Display was his nature, but without it a vital constituent part of his music would be lost, and why it should be made a matter for stricture I do not understand. Why, *par exemple*, 'encore plus forte'? It was this impulse which forced the work of the composer into dramatic or quasi-dramatic forms—he had little choice in the matter, for he was born that way, and he himself



says (1830) that he *must have a theatrical success*. It was unfortunate for Berlioz, because it so happened that *his* ideas of music drama, and contemporary ideas of music drama, were decidedly not at one: very powerful opposition kept him off the operatic stage. Moreover, the obstruction of these 'display' conations, while at first provoking a spirit of aggression on his part, gradually and inevitably reacted heavily upon him and clamped his soul in lead. It is interesting to note that with Tchaikovsky the reverse is found—his innate tendency to 'subjection' helped to make his life a round of intermittent suffering. The two emotions, subjection and elation, are closely related to what is called personality—their physical effects are on the one hand an innervation, on the other a diminution, of muscular tone—and Tchaikovsky's expressed contempt for Brahms is really an apology to his ego, a defence reaction, for his own poor showing as a personality, on account of his habitual and constitutional subjection. So we find Tchaikovsky suffering through one instinctive impulse and Berlioz from another, its reverse. Sexuality is not a supreme factor in the music of Berlioz, although it does find expression therein; it took for the most part the perfectly normal channel, the complementary sex; rising early, it was strong and persistent; on his own showing he was a roamer, but there are two episodes which show clearly the intensely purposive bent of his mind, the self-assertion brought to bear on something other than opera: when Berlioz reverted to Henrietta Smithson after the Camille Moke digression, Henrietta had really ceased to be an object of passion to him—but that frustrate conation of his had to be carried through. And Berlioz the old man strove to complete a conation started by Berlioz the lad—the object being Estelle



Dubœuf, and the intervening years being, in the directly sexual way, a lacuna: the 'golden thread' mentioned by Wotton is, in fact, a recurrent complex. No wonder he designates his love-theme an *idée fixe*! In his music, sexual passion is generally subsidiary to the macabre and assertive impulses.

Berlioz is French Romanticism in music, that is, he expresses those features of the movement which suit him best. That movement is not easily assessed by a foreigner: in the first place we have had two such periods (the ages of Shakespeare and Wordsworth) to their one, and their one laid both of ours under contribution. Perhaps the distinguishing feature of French Romanticism was its emotional violence, three centuries of literary repression bursting their bonds. The young writers took as their gods Shakespeare, Byron, Scott, and Goethe—and Berlioz took from them what suited him. The practice of drinking from a skull has been cited as something typically Berliozian, but it was a quite common practice with the Romantics, and one which they probably assimilated from our earlier romantic period—we find frequent reference to it in Elizabethan literature. But the 'conversation' which Berlioz had at Florence with the corpse of a young woman is genuinely idiosyncratic, and leads naturally to a consideration of the nature of the macabre.

It is the function of the macabre to habituate a sensitive organism to the ideas of death and destruction, corruption and decay: by the side of the Berliozian conversation just mentioned might be placed the instance of three youths who, finding themselves in the Line at too tender an age, and liking it not at all, occupied themselves during part of their rest periods at a gruesome game of 'spotting' the enemy dead (it was during the rush of an

advance). Thus automatically and unconsciously they were habituating themselves to a basically repulsive idea. The history of Berlioz in the dissecting room is another case in point: at his first encounter with an 'anatomy', he fled headlong, 'as though Death and the Devil were at my heels. The following night and day were indescribable. Hell seemed let loose upon me, and I felt that no power on earth should drag me back to that Gehenna', then, little by little, he became accustomed. And so the Florentine 'conversation' is not, after all, a piece of senseless bravado, but clear evidence offered, perhaps to others, certainly to himself, that he has not merely conquered the innate dread, but is actually on the best of terms with the object of it. The macabre stimulus enters through the ear and not *originally* through the eye; transfer is made with experience from one sense to the other: the aural genesis of the macabre gives it a sort of option on musical expression. Anyone who is attracted to the macabre is so attracted through neural diathesis: he is innately disposed to take notice of certain sounds which connote potential injury to the organism, then of certain related sights: the ultimate form of the injury being death, the ultimate visual object is the product of death, namely, dead and corruptive entities, and these have to be accommodated by habituation. That this habituation should not infrequently issue in fine works of art is accounted for quite simply by the fact that the habituating organism is of such acute sensitivity. The operation of this basic fear involves a wide range of feeling, varying from a slight leucocholia to intense melancholy, depending upon the original relative strength of the instinct; no doubt with most persons of moderate instinctive endowment it takes the form of a periodic fluctuating *malaise* called moodi-

ness, or idiomatically 'blues'. Some attempt has recently been made to compute the relative strength of the instincts by means of a psycho-galvanic arc apparatus.

The macabre involves primarily the objects and ideas connected with death and decay; but these objects and ideas involve other instincts and emotions and the ideas to which they attach themselves: these include repulsion—disgust, curiosity—wonder, aggression—anger; the ideas themselves cover a very wide range—graveyards, tombs, coffins, and corpses, the process of corruption; the whole supernatural range attaching to wonder, and including the various discarnate entities such as ghosts and poltergeists; witches and their accessories; the grotesque; the manifold grades of djann, and daemons found in Oriental tales and legends, as well as the less outrageous Occidental devils; the various elements of the rosicrucian pseudo-canon—sylphs and fairies, nymphs and dryads, salamanders and will-o'-the-wisps, gnomes. The macabre does not involve either belief or disbelief: those who can accept the stimulus do so with interest; those who reject it do so without regret. In the civilized state the basic instinct is likely to prove a very awkward liability to its possessor: in the first place it predisposes him to the black disorder, then it causes him to adopt a shambling social gait, on account of which he is likely to impugn society; by observation we find that there are three courses, only one of which the person may ultimately take: the first is non-morbid, it is the way of revelation and habituation, and excellent examples in different styles are to be found in the lives and works of Poe, Berlioz, Robert Burton, Beddoes, and Sir Thomas Browne. The second course is that of morbid possession, when the organism yields complete sway to the impulses; it is the path of insanity, and

the most painful instance we have is that of the poet Cowper—in his case the insanity took the form of a damnation complex. Tchaikovsky seems to have vacillated between the non-morbid and the morbid, inclining finally to the former and contemning the 'snub-nosed horror'; this vacillation is reflected faithfully in the music, and I would instance specifically those remarkable climaxes (which some people find so objectionable) like short fierce storms on a placid sea, notably in the *andante cantabile* of the Fifth Symphony. The third course is that which has incurred the forthright condemnation of modern psychologists, it is the path of attempted suppression and supersession. The most interesting example is that of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and here the facts differ so radically from the phenomena that I will deal with them at some length. Johnson passes in the world as the typical Englishman, robustious and opinionated. Remove the shell, and there is found a man ridden by the fear of death almost from the dawn of consciousness right to the hour of his dissolution; he never faced his problem squarely—he dared not allow himself to think vitally, but to talk and talk on a bare minimum of superficial thought: Bozzie was not the worst babbler—the great Cham strove to drown his fears in oceans and oceans of talk, these the sententious *obiter dicta*. The following quotations culled from the 'Everyman' volumes may serve to clarify the matter: the references are I, 30, 31, 277, 368, 377–8, 516, 613; II, 425, 479, 526, 594: 'The "morbid melancholy", which was lurking in his constitution . . . gathered such strength in his twentieth year, as to afflict him in a dreadful manner . . . he felt himself overwhelmed with an horrible hypochondria . . . and with a dejection, gloom, and despair, which made existence misery . . . and all his

labours, and all his enjoyments, were but temporary interruptions of its baleful influence. . . . I am aware that he himself was too ready to call such a complaint by the name of *madness*. . . . He mentioned to me now, for the first time, that he had been distressed by melancholy, and for that reason had been obliged to fly from study and meditation, to the dissipating variety of life. . . . B: "But is not the fear of death natural to man?" J: "So much so, Sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of it". . . . When we were alone, I introduced the subject of death, and endeavoured to maintain that the fear of it might be got over. . . . Here I am sensible I was in the wrong, to bring before his view what he ever looked upon with horror. . . . He answered, in a passion, "No, Sir, let it alone. . . ." He was so provoked, that he said: "Give us no more of this"; and was thrown into such state of agitation, that he expressed himself in a way that alarmed and distressed me . . . he feared death, but he feared nothing else. . . . Talking of constitutional melancholy, he observed, "A man so afflicted, Sir, must divert distressing thoughts, and not combat with them." B: "May not he think them down, Sir?" "No, Sir. To attempt to *think them down* is madness. . . ." . . . Death, whenever it appears, fills me with melancholy (age 73). . . . His thoughts in the latter part of his life were frequently employed on his deceased friends. He often muttered these, or such like sentences: "Poor man! and then he died". . . . Dr. Johnson surprised him not a little, by acknowledging with a look of horror, that he was much oppressed by the fear of death (age 75). . . . Death had always been to him an object of terror; so that though by no means happy, he still clung to life with an eagerness at which many have wondered.' These extracts have been taken here and



there from a work of some twelve hundred pages: the curious may work out the references; the significant feature is that Johnson's terror persisted right through the grievous ill-health of his old age. These quotations cannot be more appositely capped than by the utterances of an ageing man whose mind had once been much concerned with deathly images; they are to be found in the 'Everyman' *Berlioz*: '... every day I say again to Death, "When thou wilt!" Why does he tarry? ... Yesterday I found a comfortable seat on a tomb in Montmartre cemetery and slept for two hours ... life is beautiful, but how much more beautiful death. ... Day of the dead, and, when one is dead, one is dead for a long, long time.'

### III

The macabre may be regarded as an artistic auto-psycho-pathology, bringing a person into contact with the object of his fear, then on terms of familiarity with it, and finally, perhaps, making it an object of his contempt (which is bred of familiarity). The contempt element is often to be found in the grotesque; the Church apotheosizes Death, making of it a stately ritual; a composer may come to grips with the idea of Death by writing an imposing Mass: he may also express his contempt by parody, as in the grim comedy of the Black Mass—which is exactly what *Berlioz* has done. *Berlioz* was derived from a religio-neurotic mother, who at one time sent him packing with her maternal curse as a thoroughly damned soul; his emotional instability declared itself at an early age, and maintained itself until his emotions were worn to shreds, physically from a sort of intestinal neuralgia as well as psychically from excessive use. The primacy of his impressions was a measure of their enduring qualities, that



is, while their endurance was a possibility: quite early he entered into a phase of love by way of religion; quite early, also, he found himself unable to maintain the religious opinions. Having brought himself to the frame of mind for dissecting corpses (with vocal accompaniment) he decided to turn to music, and composed, as earnest of his resolution, a cantata, choosing for the poem 'The Arab at the Tomb of his Steed'.

As Berlioz was highly endowed on both the musical and literary sides, it was inevitable that literary parallels should be sought. The first was Byron, and it was incomplete and unsatisfactory, based chiefly on the fact that Berlioz found in the work of Byron an element sympathetic to himself: it was the element of gloom and pessimism which some have alleged to be a sham, though I think it sincere, despite the fact that Byron parades it excessively in his earlier work; the next was Poe (suggested by W. R. Anderson)—and here the comparison was based on safer ground, namely, the macabre factor. That is a great deal, but it is not all. A fair and comprehensive study of the musical creations of Berlioz will reveal some decidedly Marlovian characteristics: the first of these is a flair for the magnificent; with Berlioz it is that his work is often 'cast' in superlatives—with Marlowe it is conquest, knowledge, love, wealth, and sumptuousness, all in the superlative degree, utterance in hyperbolic phrases: a conqueror's chariot is not drawn by horses, but by conquered kings—and they are given to drink blood by the bucketful. Then there is a common Berliozian-Marlovian fund of violent emotions: slaughter, rapine, brigandage. The true literary parallel is triple: Poe-Beddoes-Marlowe; and the macabre is primary. The characteristic work of Berlioz appeals, not as that of a

Frenchman to the French, but internationally—though not universally so: his adherents are powerfully affected by his music on account of a sort of neural diathesis; those who do not like him are either left cold, or—more usually—antagonized.

It has been written, quite recently, that the great musical efforts of Berlioz just missed the mark. The truth is that for many people they are too directly *on* the mark: if they had been aimed at sentimentality, just aside of the purity and richness of emotions, they would have had a much better chance of popular success. Of the three elements of his music which are so often discussed, both the melody and the harmony seem to me to have an affective quality which would place them beyond the scope of many intelligent and genuinely musical auditors, this may perhaps account for the expression, 'nous autres berlioziens'. Much of his melody has a great and original beauty; his own words should be recalled: 'the good, the beautiful, the true, the false, the ugly, are not the same to everyone'. But he has his flats: Homer also nodded, Wordsworth wrote ecclesiastical sonnets, and Mozart sometimes mere exercises. It seems to me, however, that the various elements which make up the Berliozian style find their true nexus in the orchestration. With most composers a careful study of their scores, by those who have the gift of visual-auditory transfer, is a good *pate-facit* to their music. But in the case of Berlioz this holds only to a very limited extent. Saint-Saëns, who had really little musical 'lien' with the Berliozian point of view, has expressed this matter excellently: 'A person can get no idea of his scores by reading them without having heard them; the instrumentation seems to be set out in the very teeth of common sense; it would seem—to speak techni-

cally—as if such and such a thing could not come through; and it comes through marvellously.’ The primacy of his impressions as a measure of their endurance has already been noted, and this may account for certain features of his orchestration: over the whole range he obtains his effects by intuition. He started to write even before he knew the compass of some of the instruments; it would have been enough for him, as an innovator, simply to have innovated and secured an honourable mention in textbooks, yet the products of that innovation, issuing in himself, stand unparalleled; as a boy he learnt to play a drum, a flageolet, a flute, and a guitar—and so, while his writing for the brass portrays the extremes of horror, of physical violence, and of universal dissolution, it is yet, in my opinion, his writing for wood-wind, drums, and harp which is paramount amid excellence; by means of them he obtains an atmosphere to enfold a variety of mental states and physical images—profoundest melancholy, ineffable nocturnal obscenities, gossamer caprice of fairies.

Nowadays we are in a slightly better position for hearing more of the music: by scouring Europe we can realize a fair amount of it; certainly the performances are like angel visits, but with patience one can get most of the overtures, parts of the symphonies, the *Damnation*, the Mass and the Te Deum (variously reduced), and the ‘Childhood of Christ’. The persistence of the ‘Roman Carnival’ and of the ‘Hungarian March’ is probably to be accounted for on rhythmical grounds, certainly not by considerations of the macabre.

A scrutiny of representative works from the earlier phase will help to show clearly that what was in the composer’s mind really went into his music: the comprehensive nature of the macabre must again be noted, and

it must be stipulated that the Monk Lewis-Radcliffe school of terror, then very much 'in the air', simply gave direction to what was *already* in the mind of Berlioz. He knew nothing about theories of the macabre, but he knew perfectly well what he wanted to express, he knew where his genius lay (his sardonic resentment of the success of *L'Enfance du Christ* is significant, '*même calomnieux*' he terms it), and he knew, further, that his meaning might easily be misinterpreted. Some form of literary programme or apt intitulation was therefore a necessity, and the programme or title is to be regarded (with certain important exceptions) as a guide to the mental state or dominant passion that Berlioz wishes to express in sound. The judges of the Vehmic Courts (*Francs-Juges*) were concerned in awarding and dealing *secret and terrible death*: one of the functions of the overture is to depict the extreme of terror involved in their ferocity, which it does—on the brass, as stark as could be wished; other themes relate to other emotions of Lenore and to his deliverance.

Nominally, *King Lear* has to offer all that could be wished of violent passion; the play is little short of a tragedy of blood and lust (one remembers Cornwall's 'Out, vile jelly! Where is thy lustre now?')—Berlioz, however, chooses to concentrate on the rising flood of the old king's madness and despair, and Cordelia's unavailing efforts to stem it. The conflict is admirably portrayed by the contradictory nuances noted by Wotton. Bars one to sixty-five have something the aroma of Beethoven; the next bar begins some characteristic drumming which may be taken as heralding the storm in the blood—and in nature—following in the *Allegro disperato*, which fluctuates in emotional intensity, until, with several dramatic

pauses, it works up to a black climax. The *King Lear* and the *Vehmrichter* are two thoroughly characteristic overtures: the latter involves the horror of one who passes up to the portals of death without entering; the former depicts the progress of despair of one who is doomed.

From the critical point of view *Harold in Italy* is the most intriguing, though—a personal opinion—the least successful of the symphonies; the problem is genetic. Paganini wanted a viola concerto: Berlioz wanted the fame and standing which would attach to the composer of Paganini's concerto; but Paganini wanted an exercise in virtuosity: and Berlioz tried (but failed) to force his genius into the required mould. He fell between two stools—and then recovered. The fact that he was trying to write to order may be reflected in the stricter layout of the work. The title itself is a warning to those who seek a detailed illustration of the titles in the compositions. In the introduction to the Eulenburg score, Smolian writes: '... und ein ideales Vorbild für die von ihm geplante tondichterische Gestaltung seines "Bratschen-Concertes" fand er in Lord Byron's "Childe Harold"....' Did he so? In the fourth canto of the poem, Byron takes Childe Harold to Italy; there he might conceivably have shared in the Scenes of Joy and Gloom, have seen the March of Pilgrims, have heard the Serenade, and have participated in the Orgy of Brigands. But Byron makes no mention whatever of these facts. The fourth canto has in it the best of Byron's poetry in the darker mood: it opens in character, 'I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs'; and concludes with the peerless invocation to the ocean; the general tone is misanthropic, involving a gloomy personal retrospect; he visits Ferrara, Florence, Ravenna, Rome, and broods over the tombs of the great; the essence of the



whole canto is destruction, desolation, and decay. Now, the remarkable thing is not that Berlioz has *not* reproduced in sound this poem, but that he *has* crystallized it into one phrase, the 'Harold' theme of the viola (*Solo espressivo e largamente*, Eulenburg, page seven, bar four, to page eight, bar five).

The statement that this pervasive theme does not coalesce, for example with the scenes of joy, may be accepted as fact; as adverse criticism it is ridiculous. Could such a theme be fairly intended to coalesce in such a way? But although the Scenes, the Pilgrims' March with a fine structural contour, the Serenade with some delightful writing for wood-wind, have their own merits, I am convinced that Berlioz was not composing freely, and that he must have thought, on reaching the Orgy, 'Now for it!' The *souvenirs* may be regarded either as evidence of the composer's additional care for form—in *intention*—(the Beethoven parallel has often been pointed out); or, in *effect* they may be regarded as temporary obstructions which make the ultimate flow more violent. For it *is* violent. Smolian's Exeter-Hallish characterization ' . . . einer allem Edlen und Hohen hohnsprechenden Orgie (werden)', would have been piously echoed by Matthew Arnold, who would have looked long to find any kid-glove 'Criticism of Life'. The Orgy is a first-rate exposition of Marlovian ebullience conjoint with the macabre proper: death and deathly deeds, rapine and slaughter and monstrous blasphemies. To these we may add, tentatively, the apocryphal death of Harold, culminating, according to Liszt, with a curse (in the eightieth bar from the end): 'der "Harold" von Berlioz zieht es vor, in düsterer Höhle, umringt von italienischen Räubern,



den Todeskelch zu leeren und mit seinem letzten Hauche einen letzten Fluch über die von ihm verachtete Menschheit auszustossen.'

## IV

The character and quality of the great formal tribute to Death show more clearly than anything else the bent of the composer's mind. To say that it is religious only in the very remotest sense, is to state a fact merely, not to make a contention; for religion was simply the peg on which Berlioz hung his wreath. In writing of it one may justifiably compile words of a superlative nature: 'Kolos-sal', stupendous. Because here is the positive conjunction of the two major urges—the Death stimulus and the Magnificence stimulus. It is to be doubted if the Mass has ever been adequately heard: that is, purely from the hearer's standpoint; without question the Harty-Hallé combination constitutes the *givers* par excellence; but in an enclosure anything too small, the total effect, instead of making the hearer aghast psychically, numbs him physically. A building of correct design to educe the right acoustic properties is needed, and the *Messe des Morts* is worthy of it. But the hope is lean. The emasculated provincial performances of the Requiem section help to stimulate interest in Berlioz, but they are entirely negligible musically. Although the main incidence of one's interest is likely to be on the Tuba Mirum, with its unleashing of great volumes of sound 'horribly loud'—

Noise call you it or universal groan  
As if the whole inhabitation perish'd,  
Blood, death, and deathful deeds are in that noise,  
Ruin, destruction at the utmost point.—

so wrote Milton in anticipation of the Tuba Mirum—yet it must be admitted that Berlioz manipulates wonderfully his effects of great sound alternating with something akin to silence. The *Messe des Morts* may be described as a great choral ode to Death, universal and inevitable, with its dire consequence. And if one were to suggest that the emotional line loses its character after the Offertorium, one would be accused either of heresy or of pressing facts into the service of a hypothesis. And finally the judgement of the composer on his work: 'C'était d'une horrible grandeur', he wrote to Farrand.

The life of Benvenuto Cellini is all compact of 'Marlovian' incidents, and his temperament of 'Marlovian' characteristics—or so he wishes us to believe. He had a flair for magnificence: Popes and Kings and Grand Dukes were his intimates: Cardinals were small fry; his bigger works were planned on the colossal scale, his smaller ones were distinguished by great elaboration and sumptuousness of detail. Above all, he made himself out to be the swashbuckling flaunter of death. Such a character was made for Berlioz, and Berlioz jumped at him.

*Allegro deciso con impeto. ♩=112.*



Here is a superb gesture of bravado put into music; but it must be heard fully, not in reduction. The libretto is

simply shocking. The authors were said to be Vigny, Barbier, Léon de Wailly—but the first and second have been substantially exculpated. Out of a life crowded with incident the author has chosen episodes either lacking in dramatic force or unsuited to scenic presentation; and he has simply played ducks and drakes with the *Memoirs*: historical accuracy may certainly be sacrificed to dramatic effect; but the egregious distortions and involutions and gross inventions of the librettist are intolerable: it was quite unnecessary to invent Teresa when Angelica was to be had, or to lift the Perseus out of place and time when the necromancer was waiting with legions of devils in the Coliseum. The unqualified failure of this opera had, ultimately, the effect of changing radically the outlook of the composer. It dammed the assertive impulse which was so basic a part of him, and—again ultimately—brought about the failure of those stimuli to which can be traced the real characteristics of his earlier phase of composition. But it is of the nature of a dammed impulse to work round its obstruction; it is not certain that Berlioz, cast in an original mould, could satisfactorily have adapted himself to orthodox opera; and it is at least worth asking if his wonderful 'evasions' of operatic orthodoxy are not as valuable to music as any opera done in the odour of orthodoxy could be. Before the first of these evasions is considered, it may be well to mention three titles, still showing the incidence of the composer's interest; the titles are: *Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale*; *La Mort d'Ophélie*, ballad; *Marche Funèbre pour la dernière scène d'Hamlet*. Enter a dead march.

From Gluck Berlioz learnt that the passions could be expressed directly and immediately in music; Gluck has an intense pathos which overwhelmed his French admirer,

who found additional attractions in material drawn from the classics and in a delicacy of style in writing for the wood-wind: we may consider that Berlioz was helped a little both by the example of Gluck and by the teaching of Lesueur. In the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* he found pathos in abundance: out of this, his first operatic 'evasion', he made what he himself calls a dramatic symphony: and what is, in fact, a symphony with extensive choral 'punctuation'. The macabre subject here is of Death the destroyer of love, of youth, and of beauty.

Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,  
 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:  
 Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet  
 Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,  
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there.

Smolian calls it *Liebessymphonie*: which shows how heedlessly titles can be applied. The first part (*Allegro fugato*) deals symphonically with feudal riotousness; the next section, Prologue (contralto solo and chorus) explains what is past and what is to come; the subsequent brief Strophes constitute a sort of invocation to love; the Scherzetto (still vocal) expounds Mercutio's Queen Mab speech; the second part (*Andante malincolico—Larghetto—Allegro*) treats symphonically of Romeo alone, his melancholy, and the Capulet feast. Part Three is the—symphonic—love-scene proper; part four is the Queen Mab Scherzo; this is followed by Juliet's funeral cortège; Romeo at the tomb; the reconciliation; and the Oath. In short, this love symphony, based on a play of feverish sexual passion untimely frustrate, has one part allotted to the sentiment of love. Now Berlioz had a very special regard for the love-scene; but in his *Memoirs* he has shown that

it was the idea of Love and Death in conflict that fascinated him: and, in particular, he had been very much pre-occupied with Juliet's speech, beginning: 'How if, when I am laid into the tomb,' and his ultimate conception of her must have been that 'Death lies on her like an untimely frost'. The emotional line of the work, in performance, is remarkably fluid; the conception and the working out—in contrast with the *Harold* Symphony—are entirely unconstrained. But two movements are simply marvellous: the Queen Mab Scherzo and the *Convoi funèbre de Juliette*. To analyse the Scherzo is to perpetrate an autopsy on a butterfly of rare beauty. The living effect is to be sought in the disposition of the instrumental parts. Here is the expression of the 'wonder' element of the macabre, and 'wonder' on its more aërial side: correlates are the dances of the sylphs and will-o'-the-wisps; these two may be moved from their location in *Faust* (as they usually are) for purposes of comparison. That these three pieces, out of their context, should have attained to a fairly wide popularity among audiences complacently self-styled 'middle-brow', may—as with the 'Hungarian March' and 'Carnaval Romain' Overture—be ascribed tentatively and partially to the rhythms: in the case of the Scherzo, the Sylphs, and the Salamanders, to be inferred from the signatures 3-8, 3-8, 3-4. In the first of these—the Scherzo—while the theme is given substantially to the strings, it is the entourage of wood-wind (including horns), percussion used quaintly and with great delicacy, and harp-harmonics, that gives atmosphere, character, and the quality of contrast to the piece. Citations (in Eulenburg) can be made on pages 185, 194-5, 201, 208 and following, 218 and following. The brass is omitted: it was unnecessary for audiences of the composer's day to wait



for *Beatrice*, to find that he was not 'noisy'. The Ballet des Sylphes is much more rarefied, though not entirely dissimilar in texture; the instrumentation is so marvelously reduced as to become not a fact but almost a suggestion. The *Menuet des Follets* is by contrast vividly capricious, the brass being introduced to reinforce the sharp, short augmentations and alternations which characterize the dartling behaviour of the will-o'-the-wisps. Each of these pieces shadows forth to perfection its own class of 'elementals'. Reverting at length to the *Convoi funèbre de Juliette*, a piece of short duration but filled full of most wonderful funereal effects—'tod-duftig'—we find the march theme given at first instrumentally (strings and wood-wind), the choir supplying a sort of vocal pointing, in monotone, in octaves, giving remarkably the effect of a passing-bell; then the parts are reversed, voices taking the theme, violins and violas supplying the pointing and being joined in the last few bars by the flutes. The brevity of the piece enhances its power and beauty, the auditor is left suspended in admiration.

A scrutiny of the Berlioz *Faust* (1846), comparatively and without bias, concedes some remarkable points to the macabre thesis. It may be said fairly that Berlioz was deeply affected by his reading of Goethe's *Faust* (Part One). But what was it that affected him in particular? Was it the essential *Faust* of Goethe? Why were the good folk of Berlin shocked when Berlioz gave *his Faust* there? Why should Zelter denominate the earlier, related 'Scenes'—croakings and eructations, the leavings of an abortion gotten through shocking incest? The facts are that Berlioz seized upon the elements of Goethe's *Faust* that suited him, Berlioz—and that the *Faust* of Berlioz is not the essential *Faust* of Goethe. The ultimate work of



Berlioz is entitled *La Damnation de Faust*; Berlioz is vitally involved in the perdition of his hero, emotionally, and not in his reclamation, ethically and philosophically; and makes of it a most picturesque damnation; damnation in that style is something really desirable: to be damned on these terms is preferable far to an anæmic twangling of harps. The man on whose memory the monstrous accretions fixed themselves died about 1540; in 1587 appeared the *Faustbuch*, and, shortly after, *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr. John Faustus*. He was 'the Great Conjuror'. The grotesqueries exist from the beginning. Marlowe's play, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, appeared within two years of the *Faustbuch*. Although Berlioz could not feasibly have known the *Tragical History*, and although the *Damnation of Faust* is drawn and transmuted from Goethe's *Faust*, of elements congenial to the composer, it will yet be found that in gross effect the *Damnation* is much closer akin to the *Tragical History*: and that not merely because, in each case, the hero finishes up most bloodily. Anyone may test this by means of a side by side reading of Goethe's *Faust* (Part One) and the *Tragical History*, to be done something prior to a complete broadcast transmission of the *Damnation*. The absence of Walpurgis music has been explained (Wotton: *Four Works*)—it may also be said that the Ride has provided ample compensation, and the presence of both parts would involve excess of one element. For the rest, taken over all its four parts, the *Damnation* is a blend of diabolism and grotesquerie, of romance and melancholy, of rosicrucianism choicely sublimated, and of the baroque. And the pious Berliners found that the strong emphasis on, and keen zest displayed in, the diabolism

and grotesquerie and supernaturalism were not at all to their liking.

The overture to the *Corsair* has a peculiar and vital interest. We know that Berlioz had read appreciatively both the *Corsair* and its companion-piece, *Lara*: each of these contains a projection of Byron on his darker side, with excess of parade. The *Corsair* holds a storm scene. Berlioz had been involved in a bad storm off Nice, the 'Nizza, Nizza' episode of the *Memoirs*. But the real interest lies in the connection between the *Tower of Nice* Overture of 1845 and the later *Corsair*. Because there must have been a change of temper; Bernard's lurid epithets may be substantially discounted, but even then there remains a certainty that the effect of the *Tower of Nice* was definitely other than that of the *Corsair*. A change of style, actual and progressive, from the time of the *Corsair* Overture, has been detected by most critics, the consensus of opinion being fairly at one in this matter: *Beatrice and Benedict*, the *Capture of Troy*, and the *Trojans at Carthage*, are instanced as the works of a reformed Berlioz. But also on *a priori* grounds a change of style taking place somewhere about the year 1850 may reasonably be stipulated. The time of the onset of emotional and visceral decay would seem to vary with individual constitutions: with Wagner it seems to have been relatively late, with Berlioz relatively early. He wore himself to shreds, and the wearing process was aggravated by what has been vaguely called 'intestinal neuralgia'—and by the drug he took to allay it. The fountains of his inspiration were dried up: the macabre, partly by close habituation, partly by the removal of the sting of death, involving, further, the failure of the 'display' stimulus. In fact, this last dates back to the failure of *Benvenuto*, but it was arrested and

suspended for some time by the 'evasions' previously noted. Since life proved far other than the roseate itinerary he had once imagined, and since the Parisian opera gave its everlasting nay, there was little residuary meaning in the macabre, and small scope for the gesture of magnificence. His treatment of the play *Much Ado About Nothing* is highly significant: that play had every element of tragedy in it except the ending as effected by the Dogberry-Verges constabulary. Berlioz declines contact with the darker elements: he purges them and holds to the Beatrice-Benedict episodes. That is not characteristic of the earlier phase. But in the later phase the cognitive elements are corroborated and there *is* a residuary technique, and a very fine one; there are also indirect reminiscences of an earlier emotional life. In the case of Berlioz he reverted directly to the interests of his boyhood—classical studies; and the outcome of these residua and reversions and reminiscences is the great opera based on the story of Troy and of Aeneas and Dido. To what extent was there a falling off in the characteristics of the earlier phase? Mozart is now a more suitable model than Gluck or Weber; a work of Gounod is condemned for its frenetic incontinence.

A consideration of the relative value of the later phase of Berlioz involves an examination of 'culminating phases' in general: there has been in the past a tendency to regard the work of an artist's later creative period as his best: necessarily so, because (it was thought) there was an accumulation of practical and technical experience which culminated towards the end of his creative life; Goethe—for example, *Faust*, Part Two—and Shakespeare (the romantic plays) have been adduced as examples. This hypothesis has validity only when technical and

constructive excellence is reckoned as the paramount feature of some artist's work: otherwise it rests on a sandy bottom. There is an awful warning contained in the complete poetical works of Wordsworth; for a while he wrote wonderfully—afterwards like a drab. The facts are that when an artist's work is clearly recognizable as deriving from some particular emotion, or complex of emotions, that work ceases to maintain its genuine characteristic when the emotional spring dries up, which is usually in the 'culminating phase', exceptions being those of an extraordinary length of emotional life; and of this Wagner may be an example. Other characteristics may supervene; usually the artist becomes 'respectable' and orthodox; or he may pursue his ideas, as ideas, out of their emotional setting, to the utmost bounds of the fantastic.<sup>1</sup> With Berlioz this cleavage of style and aim would seem to be well marked at about the time of the *Nice-Corsair* Overture. But there is a further probability, a strong one, to be taken into account in a general consideration of 'culminating phases': and it concerns the 'uplift' virus.

## V

The uplift virus seems to be endemic among Teutonic peoples: its crowning achievement was the perversion of the Renaissance into the Reformation—Erasmus found a bantam egg and Luther hatched it into a game cock. The uplift virus finds a very suitable breeding-place in 'culminating phases': an artistic once-rebel, gone respectable and savouring the odour of sanctity, is very likely to provide in this later work points for morals, adornments for tales, and tags for sermons. Conversely, he may

<sup>1</sup> That vast domain of art which involves the Sentiments with more insistent thought-content is here neither entered nor discussed.

pursue his ideas, denuded of their emotional setting, well over the borders of the utterly fantastic. Continuing the principle of culminations we find that the retractions of Boccaccio, Rabelais, and Chaucer are the best things they ever did. After the Breeches Bible, the allegory of the *Song of Solomon*, and Thomas Bowdler, *le cas Berlioz* may be considered. Hadow states that Berlioz understood his medium only partially: whereas it is clear that Hadow has no innate capacity for appreciating the characteristic Berlioz. At the end of a first-rate analysis of the *Fantastic Symphony*, Wotton (Four Works) writes: 'But, as Paul Rosenfeld has finely observed: "behind the fiery, the volcanic Berlioz, behind the Byronic and fantastical composer, there was always another and a greater man"'. And to that greater man nine-tenths of the symphony is due.' Something else is due, also,—the registration of a club for promoting a bigger, bolder, brighter, and better Berlioz. It is the sort of thing that makes one sit and writhe. And as Lawrence has finely observed: 'We climbed the steep ascent . . .' It may be that a sevenfold amen is concealed in the witches' round; but it is remarkable that when a fiery and volcanic and fantastic abundance is offered freely for the having, it should be turned away and a search instituted for some idealistic sterility of which, frankly, there is not the slightest trace. Masson censures him for ignoring the metaphysical vapourings of his day!

To restate briefly the function and phenomena of the macabre in Art: it is based ultimately on the emotions of fear and wonder; it is a process of overcoming by habituation; it involves highly sensitive organisms; it involves images of death, corruptiveness, and the supernatural; its original mental feature is one of *malaise* fluctuating in



intensity; its 'pleasure' is that of any successful conation, here the creation, or realization, of a suitable image or activity; pictorially it has found expression in the works of (among others) Holbein, Doré, and Hogarth, who, in particular, is saturated with it—dead dogs and cats, gibbets, skeletons, corpses, and tombs, are a feature of his work. In literature the best examples are to be found in the creations of Poe and Beddoes; but there are two very fine individual images, both lupine: Shelley's

Like a wolf that had smelt a dead child out,  
and Webster's

But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,  
For with his nails he'll dig them up again.



But Shakespeare, who can usually transcend, excels in this also: his finest image is of a striking macabre beauty—an 'other-beauty' admittedly; it is to be found in *Richard III*:

So now prosperity begins to mellow,  
And drop into the rotten mouth of death . . .

That is beyond approach. Some of the poetry of Crabbe is also interesting in its macabre bearings. And mention of the dirge from the *White Devil* brings to mind that Berlioz is of the earth, earthy—the son of his Mother; and of fire, fiery, and ethereal of air. Phrases such as to be 'half in love with easeful Death', 'voluptuous contemplation of Death', 'To cease upon the midnight with no pain', might induce the erroneous belief that self-destruction is the ultimate of the macabre; and the end of Beddoes may lend colour to such a belief. But it rests on a sandy bottom. The macabre of itself does not proceed beyond itself. Other elements, strengthening themselves upon the *failure*



of the macabre stimulus, *may* lead to such a result. The idea of suicide is implicit in certain Oriental faiths, and in a philosophy of classical times—Stoicism; and, with this last, self-slaughter may ensue purely as the result of a process of ratiocination. The death of Beddoes was the last link of a cognitive chain: he found no object worth his constancy. Suicide is the result either of an intellectual process or of gross emotional instability—insanity. The macabre is non-morbid and sane: it does not repress. The morbid of half a century ago is the non-morbid of to-day; the macabre is to the highest degree subjective in its preferences—where there is an absence of reaction there is indicated a relative absence, or atrophy, of the underlying impulses; but where the result is one of absolute repulsiveness there is strong evidence of repression. The total effective sphere of the macabre would not be large, but it is greatly delimited by the influence and example of ‘repressor’ types. The macabre is generally explicit and circumstantial: even amid our neo-Georgian *Aufklärung*, which claims to see things as they are, whole and entire, it is not unusual to meet with an assertion to the effect that what is suggested has more validity than what is stated. Now this is quite at variance with the practice of the great masters in this medium, who are circumstantial to the last drop of blood and the faintest glimmer of corruption; further, it has no ultimate sanction, except, perhaps, that of some anæmic gentleman of a past generation, who, in self-defence against the bloody and stark, propounded the ‘suggestion-more-than-fact’ heresy: this, in its extremity, postulates for the highest æsthetic a world of deaf-mutes communicating by gesture, with the silent film as their only art-form. Speech and language are, presumably, to conceal thought. There is, of course,

a pregnancy of silence; but the value of this, and of reticence, is relative, and its virtue one of contrast: 'And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.' If the right image could be assured as a consequent, the value of suggestion would be much enhanced; but it cannot. The Shakespeare quotation cited above holds a great deal of suggestion most striking in its explication, but an unperceptive reader will miss nearly all. The shoddiness of the suggestion trick in the service of repression can be exposed further: suggestion must suggest—images (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). Who should supply these better than the artist? The position is admirably stated in the *Sunday Times*, in a review of the short stories of Mr. de la Mare: 'the familiar elusive quality and the familiar disinclination to bring the hammer down with anything like a bang at the catastrophe . . . so much is implied, so little said, that the reader has to grope for the point of the tale.' That was the difficulty preconceived by Berlioz: music is not, by development, circumstantial; though it probably was so in origin: and Berlioz had to have a programme or suitable title to help him to carry out his aims. The macabre does not exact belief in its products: 'We are affected only as we believe' is another Johnsonian lie. The macabre is direct: the exhalation of melancholy is a part, but only a part; the only test of its sincerity is the intensity and immediacy of appeal to those who can be recognized as answerable to the stimulus. But by the side of the macabre proper there exists a bastard form, and this also, having a well-known musical example, will need to be examined.

For most people of moderate instinctive endowment the claims of the macabre are met, fairly and honestly—but in a mild way—by death-scenes in novels, operas, and

modern films; here and there may appear a more impelling urge: the work of Erich von Stroheim, for example, points to a subtle master in a quite new medium; but he has to be 'cut' enormously to reduce him to popular requirements, and, even so, his work is branded as venomous and corruptive by undiscerning critics. As a novelist of the past generation, Hardy may be cited, and, though *Jude* at once suggests itself, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* will be found more decidedly saturated with the macabre principle; of the present, Lawrence: *Women in Love* presents Dis and Astarte in strange and uneasy conjunction; another example of love and death strangely blent is Donne's *Anniversarie*, beginning 'All Kings, and all their favourites'. These are all straight examples: the distinguishing feature of the bastard-macabre is its sentimentality; the emotion, rich and direct, is missed—its sentimental fringe is taken in. The medium is attempted, but no power to use it is shown; it is a process of meaningless, frustrate titillation, comparable with the futile titillation of the reproductive urge in sloshy novels, as distinct from its treatment by the great masters of sexual passion. The best literary examples of the bastard-macabre are those of the Walpole-Radcliffe-Lewis-Maturin school, which gave direction to the imagination of Berlioz. The most insistent musical example of the bastard-macabre is the *Danse Macabre* of Saint-Saëns.

The ageing Berlioz sponsored the rising Saint-Saëns, but beyond the fact that both were Gluckists no genuine nexus is to be found; a few incidental features of resemblance—there was a fair Irish woman who had some musical influence on Camille: but she was not Henrietta; Camille employs the *Dies Irae* freely in his third Symphony (1886), perhaps as a result of preoccupation with

the idea of death during a recent serious illness; he also wrote a Cellini opera, on a libretto much more in line with the *Memoirs*, calling it (probably out of deference to Berlioz) *Ascanio*. Also he wrote the *Danse Macabre*. But all these were superficial. Saint-Saëns and the original Berlioz were almost diametrically opposed in temperament and tastes, Saint-Saëns mild and retiring, his emotional life quite superficial. He was not the man to write a macabre piece—nor did he: the poem of Cazalis, that he took as his text, is familiar and vulgar. The resultant third Symphonic Poem has, excepting its third performance—under Padeloup—been very successful, and maintains its popularity: more strong rhythms. Unfortunately, those who go to be titillated by skeletons and rattle-bones miss the point entirely: it is not midnight, but mid-day; and the hinds leave the stackyard for a rustic dance; and Saint-Saëns, who all his life hated the brass at strength, has borrowed some from the village band to help out the fiddles; and the Mopseys, all of a row, take part in a slightly grotesque agrestic dance, bobbing and mowing and jerking. It is all very good fun. The oboe-cock-a-doodle-doo (Durand, p. 50) is not so succesful as some other of the composer's 'farmyard imitations', he is no blood-brother of the one that dissolves the ghost in *Hamlet*; rather of Milton's, that

'to the stack, or the Barn dore,  
Stoutly struts his Dames before . . .'

Saint-Saëns, who was not constituted to receive the stimulus, how could he present the stimulus? This dance, which is quite exhilarating, induces a pleasurable effect almost undifferentiated.

The Fantastic Symphony is the supreme achievement

of the macabre in music: on its own lines it has no cor-rival. It is so intensely subjective, that, on finding it assessed as 'objective' (Wotton, *Four Works*) one is left to marvel at the vague connotation of some terms; one dictionary (Cassell) defines 'subjectivity' as 'characterised by the prominence given to the individuality of the author or artist'; another (Oxford) defines it as 'expressing the artist's idiosyncrasy rather than transcribing external realities'. In the *Fantastic Symphony* the individuality of Berlioz is decidedly prominent; the work is idiosyncratic; but also, if it does not transcribe, it certainly describes—realities: the subtle distinction is between 'objectivity' and 'realism'. There are two sorts of realism—subjective and objective. Objective realism involves the dispassionate aloofness of the artist, as in the novels of Balzac; subjective realism involves the passionate affinity of the artist for his realities. Acute personal feeling. That is Berlioz: 'Il revit véritablement les sentiments qu'il se propose de peindre'. (Masson) 'Truly does he re-create': that is the essence of subjectivity. The *Symphony* is a perfect work of art on any count—in its progress it creates and supplies certain needs, stipulating only a genuinely receptive organism: it is homogeneous, one part proceeds inevitably to the next; however heterogeneous their origins—surplusage of early works, *Faust*, *Vehmrichter*—the collective themes and pieces were not transferred irrespective of meaning, as in the Rossinian manner: love themes, *March to the Place of Execution*, *Walpurgis Ballet*, were originally themselves. And they are choicely blended in.

The *Symphony* has been dealt with analytically or genetically by nearly every writer on Berlioz: excellent analyses in English may be found in the *Essay* by Newman and in the *Four Works* by Wotton. Structure in its



purely affective bearings seems not to have been investigated, and this seems to me an avenue of approach to the Symphony, at least as important as any other for a full understanding of it. The *idée fixe* of the Symphony, its root theme and its pervasive nexus, may feasibly have represented Estelle, as also did the love theme of *Romeo*: she was the composer's 'image of love', not as already stated, an object of passion, but the core of a deep-seated complex. As for the programme setting of the work—it was considered, apparently, towards the close of the last century, an evil thing for composers to stage their works in opium dreams: and all right-minded people would—Smolian exhorts—abandon the idea of the definitive programme, that the first three parts were distortions and perversions from an opium world. It must be recalled that, over several years, Berlioz seems to have added mellowing touches to the whole work. In favour of the definitive programme it may be said that some slight added coherency is afforded by it: but it must also be admitted that, towards the close of the *Scène aux Champs*, the emotional line of the work shifts by a most remarkable transition to another plane, where it stays till the end. This emotional line fluctuates—as an emotional line should—but it is unbroken. It starts pacifically with the *Largo*, rising by fluctuating gradations throughout its course until the *Allegro*, and 'nexal' theme: the *Largo* is taken to embody the reveries and the vague, undifferentiated, hectic strivings, which, focalized by the theme, receive additional intensity as 'ardours' and run their course of strain, agitation, and depression right through the *Allegro*. An emotional 'line' is not something which necessarily coincides with augmentation or diminution of rhetorical or musical effects—of volume, pitch, quality, or time; it is an intimate record of the progress of



augmentation and diminution of affective tone, first created by the composer, then received and re-created by his auditors: being 'intimate' it has no universal validity, though a central tendency is undoubtedly to be found among the reactions, taken in the gross, of a large musical audience. So in the *Allegro* some may find augmentations of emotional tone coincide with volume of sound. By the end of the movement the emotional drainage is so great as to *demand* respite or change: it is supplied by the Dance movement; that is one of the reasons for a previous statement, 'one part follows inevitably from another'. The 'religious consolation', added later (*religiosamente*), acts as a bridge—so avoiding too abrupt a transition. The *Valse* section provides relaxation from the mental tension of the preceding section by way of physical preoccupation, and thus admits of a reservation for the *Scène aux Champs*: I am aware that the idea of mental-physical compensations is not strictly orthodox—but it seems to me that this should hardly be extended to the 'activity-in-repose', which is the way of art. In any event the Ball *does* afford rest-by-change: omit the *Valse*, and the *Largo*, following right on the *Allegro*, will induce revulsion. The *Valse* also affords an instance of the 'contradictory nuances' noted by Wotton, a *crescendo* simultaneously paralleled by a *diminuendo*; the effect of this must always be to promote a sense of strain, and here, in this movement, the emotional 'line' rises very little except to the *idée fixe* (p. 70, bar 12) (citations in Eulenburg) and to this contradictory nuance (pp. 73-4). This is the part of the Symphony which most tends to objective realism.

The effect of the opening of the *Scène aux Champs* is one of acute tenseness; it is the effect of reticence and (relative) silence, and, manipulated skilfully, with suit-

able alternations throughout, finishes almost unbearably. The rural peace has induced 'unaccustomed calm': this calm seems most akin to the ecstatic *o altitudo* of mystics; perhaps there is some physical (that is aural, or tonal) basis for this: the beginning of the *Lohengrin* Prelude comes at once to mind as a similar keying up of tension. When, in this *Adagio*, direction is given to the tenseness by the symbolic *idée fixe* (both before and after its entrance) the tenseness seems to me to be relaxed, the emotional 'line' to fall, contrariwise to the turbulence of the sound, and unlike the earlier *Allegro*. Berlioz is said to have given much structural care to this part of the Symphony: this will account for the natural and satisfying transition to another plane—for the general movement of the *Adagio* is toward mental exhaustion and annihilation. It will be recalled that the macabre involves a mental process which has, as fundament, melancholy fluctuating in character; *malaise* is the culture plot of the macabre; the Fantastic Symphony has so far given expression to acute *malaise* fastening itself to a symbolic 'love-complex'; then a respite of physical rhythm and imagery, still carrying the love-complex; followed by most intense *malaise*, still carrying the complex, and apparently unescapable; but, just as the sane mental process merges naturally into the definite imagery of the macabre, so, toward the end of this movement, does the emotional line shift to the macabre plane where the 'complex' symbol is transformed; it is done quite marvellously—(p. 130, bars 3 and 4) four kettle-drum beats, foretelling the next movement, effect the transition; there is no wrench when the time comes. Meanwhile the movement continues to its own close, drums giving the suggestion of thunder, or—like the earlier 'pulsating rhythms'—of blood fretting

and pounding within the ear; one melancholy pipe muted, the other forlorn (129-30); and the terrific emotional climax which ends the first three parts of the symphony—solitude, silence. As a lost soul, out of all time, in a midnight ravine

Like one that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turn'd round, walks on,  
And turns no more his head; . . .

That is the true worth of silence.

It is remarkable that the keenest appraisers and finest critics of Berlioz do mostly shy at the ensuing macabre sections: they gloss it over quickly and have done with it; it is a great pity; it is the wrong attitude of mind: even Schumann blanches at the Sabbath. Yet these last parts of the Fantastic are absolutely dead-central to the characteristic earlier Berlioz. Perhaps it is thought that this diabolistic bloodiness rises in, and appeals to, the 'lower' man—which may be true; but it is worth while to recall that modern teaching assesses the 'lower' man as fundamental and quintessential, the 'higher' man as a gloze, quite often morbid and anæmic, very lightly made on the 'lower' man. This *Marche au Supplice* is a march of herd obscenity, the gross herd surging and shrieking, and alternating with it the inexorable march of the lesser musical herd against which Berlioz smashed himself so unremittingly and so unavailingly. Apart from the striking alternations there are three other features which converge to give an eerie colouring to the mood: the first is the insistent pounding of the drums; next the gruesome capering of the bassoons, starting—p. 133, bar 9—and resuming more horridly, p. 136, bar 5; thirdly the rever-

berations of a quasi-surreptitious cymbal-stroke on the last beat—p. 141, last bar, and p. 148, bar 5. Music would hardly have been thought capable of the truncation circumstance of the Symbol, without its evidence here, followed by the yelling, rampaging mob. The shift to the Black Sabbath is a quite natural one. A tremolo of remote phantasmagoria, but now fast approaching, is heard over bellowings from the pit: then the Celebrants arrive in infinite variety, the instrumentation portraying both this and the ‘earthglides’ most wonderfully: the Woman her Symbol appears in Sabbath dress—*Allegro*, p. 167—and is welcomed with a great yell, *Allegro assai*, and for a while she dominates the scene of revelry until an orgiastic shriek, quadruplicate—p. 176—heralds the Mass proper. That Berlioz had visualized his Black Sabbath in great detail with a welter of images, and that the baroque Sacrament is but a pretext for the bassaridic round, is well attested by the premature entrances, as through incontinence, of the *rondo*—pages 177, 178, 179, 188—and interim caperings of the Communicants between and after the acts of celebration—pages 181–2, 183–4, 186–7. Wotton finds that ‘there is nothing “burlesque” in the trombones solemnly intoning the melody in *doppio movimento*’; but that is just the point of the baroque; there *is*. Perhaps he does not countenance Black Sabbaths at the bottom of his garden. The *rondo* goes with a fine swing, round and reverse, the turns being heavily marked—page 192, bar 2, etc. It continues with a multiplication of images beyond relation, leaping and thrusting and squirming, crouching and quivering, soaring aloft and sliding down again: a Pantagruelian Catalogue would be required to do it justice; until (page 220, bar 4, etc.) the eld-famished, discarnate, tremulous voices, too ancient

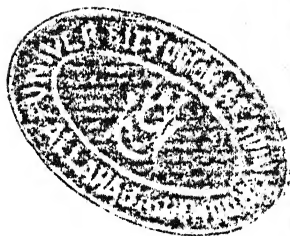
to pitch a note, quaver slightly in bat-like tones,—over elephantine wallowings of the basses. Page 224, bar 7, holds the zenith of the pre-climax, and Weingartner's recording castrates it finely: he makes it squeak when it should shriek. The revelry collapses climactically; and so concludes, right at its summit, what must be regarded as the peak of the earlier phase of Berlioz. It could happen only once in a world like ours.

His earlier work fully realizes his ideals—it is unique; he preserved his integrity, conceding nothing to bourgeois vulgarity. There is no finer characterization than this by Liszt:

‘... a passion which burns on the hearth of his Cyclopean forge, and often in a swelter so intense that the red hot iron passes into a white heat,  
as though paling with fear.’

H. BELLOC

## THE HISTORIAN



What is the historian?

The historian is he who tells a true story in writing.

Consider the members of that definition (which is exact and sufficient): by the consideration of each we shall be able to discover those ends which an historian should serve and the means by which he should attain them. This essential piece of thinking (essential because without record society lacks substance) we may approach before examining the motives which urge the historian to write, and only turn to these when we have assured ourselves of what his action should be.

There are in this definition four terms: first, the agent is a man; second, his act is that of telling a story, that is of recording a series of events in their consequence; third, the story he tells must be true; fourth, he tells it in writing.

## I

In that he is a man it is implied that he writes for other men. Now these others may be of his own kind, or of a different kind. He may be writing for an audience of his own experience and temper, using, to convince them of the truth, such methods as would bring conviction to himself: taking for granted that with which he is himself familiar; omitting what would be irrelevant to his own judgement. In so writing he considers only two parties to his task, himself and his matter. Or he may be writing for men so different from himself that he needs to stand outside himself as it were, and consider his audience as a



third object; himself, his narrative, and his audience being distinct in his mind. He must, in that case, put his imagination to perpetual pains so that he shall enter into moods which are strange to him, and unceasingly consider as he writes this foreign consciousness to which he is appealing.

We find, then, at the outset, two kinds of history necessarily differing in method, though both propose to record the truth. Here, as in every other piece of analysis designed to have practical value, we must reject with contempt those sophistries of scepticism (the intellectual curse of all civilizations as they fail through age) which would pretend that no line can be drawn between the native and the alien, between the similar and the dissimilar. We must postulate common sense and agree that there is history written for our fellows, and history written for those who are not of us.

The difference between the two kinds is determined also by the nature of the story told. Thus a Catholic writing the history of the Reformation for Catholics, and writing it truly, will write it in a different fashion from the way in which he will write it for Protestants. A Protestant describing (as in that excellent book on John Knox recently appearing from the pen of Mr. Muir) a Calvinist character, to make it understood by men who have had no personal experience of Calvinism, will write differently from one who is describing the character to other Calvinists, who have passed through the same inner experiences as those which John Knox suffered or enjoyed. A Frenchman writing the history of France for his fellow countrymen, an Englishman writing the history of England for Englishmen, will be compelled to methods other than those which either would use for telling the story of his country to foreigners.

Of this duality in method we have the greatest example when a man steeped in the air of Pagan antiquity and filled with sympathy for it undertakes to present it to those minds about him which, whether they know it or not, have been formed by a long series of Christian generations. While a converse task of perhaps greater importance to-day is imposed upon the Christian who would explain to modern minds what the full Christian culture once was: for modern minds have, in varying degrees, drifted from it.

The historian who presents his story to his own kind has clearly the simpler and by far the easier task; and it is this facility which explains the solid simplicity of all the earlier chronicles. Joinville, setting down his immortal picture of St. Louis, puts it before men who are as familiar as he himself with the arms and manners of that world. The historian writing for his own kin has only to put down in their right order those things significant to himself. In that which is the prime art of good narrative—the selection of what may be omitted—he discards without any conscious effort all that would be redundant through familiarity, and all that is of insufficient interest in his own eyes. He has but to say to himself, ‘What should I have wished to hear from one who had the advantage of my knowledge in this particular field?’

The great mass of good history and all bad history whatsoever is of this kind,<sup>1</sup> written by men for an audience of their own kind. But it is the other sort, rarely indeed

<sup>1</sup> Thus nearly all our English Histories are of this sort, being written by men in sympathy with the development of England since the Reformation and for an audience of their own temper. This is due to the peculiar homogeneity of modern England in fundamental religion and its social consequences. It is not so in countries where the citizens are profoundly divided on philosophy and morals.

achieved, which does the principal work, for it is the other sort which cuts against the grain as it were, is put to a special effort, feels itself dealing with harder material and, therefore, if successful, is productive of the more enduring result. I do not use the word 'steadfast' in the sense that such work alone can survive among men, for an historical work may survive through its charm apart from its justice, and will often survive the better for repeating cherished falsehoods; but 'steadfast' in the sense that a conversion, as it were of one's audience, is brought into being when one impresses them with an unfamiliar truth. A new state of mind has been created and takes root.

There is this next consideration attaching to the fact that the historian is a man; it implies that he is writing of human things. He cannot but make men his standard. If, therefore, he pretend indifference to the sense of right and wrong which is characteristic of man, or to the sense of the comic which is characteristic of man, or to the strain between reality and the ideal which is the sense of the tragic and is also peculiar to man ('in his eyes foreknowledge of death'), or if he present a story wherein the hidden springs of action are not those which all men know to be the true springs of action determining the labours of mankind, his story is warped and bad. Thus it is that in all the great historians we discover, though more often by implication than in set phrase, the constituents of man's soul. We assist as we read them at tragedy, at comedy, at ambition, despair, and even occasional gleams of beatitude.

## II

The second term of definition is the Story: that is, events in a certain consequence.

Herein we discover that essential of soundness in history, that it shall possess the mind with a reasonable process. It must establish not only the 'How' but the 'Why'. A mere relation unconnected (however subtle and hidden the connection) by the chain of cause and effect is chaotic and inhuman, making that which in criticism we call 'The Dull'.

In this connection appears the truth that history is not good history unless it is readable, unless it occupies the eager and receptive soul of man as a listener. False and insufficient history may also do that. History is not sound because it is readable. But history which is not readable is not history at all.

That dense phalanx of modern academic historians whose work is as dry and as dissociated, as detailed and as formless, as sawdust, are, properly speaking, not historians at all; and the contempt which they too often manifest for those who possess the gifts they themselves lack is a measure of their own incapacity. It must needs be that mere detail should be accumulated without consideration of its place in the whole scale, for there must be quarrying before there is building, and there must be a carrying of bricks before there is the construction of a wall. But let not the humble multitude whose function it is to shoulder the hod set up for architects, or even for builders: they are nothing of the kind.

The story told is the more easy to tell readably when it concerns a single personality. On this account many men may attempt with some success the historical biography who have not the parts for a more general scheme. The greater the number of characters, the larger the scene, the more numerous the reactions between various motives and various material surroundings, the more difficult

is the historical task. But whether that task be attempted in the limited business of biography or the large one of presenting a general pageant of affairs, two prime conditions attach to it, as they must to everything which proceeds from the creative powers of man. These two conditions are conditions of limitation: first there must be a frame, and secondly there must be that triunity which the philosopher demanded, a beginning, a middle, and an end.

History is not false but true when it is put dramatically. It is not true but false when it arrives anyhow, proceeds at random like an unconsidered run of nature, and ceases unravelled without the gathering of the threads into a conclusion. If you would set before men a just account of, say, the transformation through which our people went when they passed from the antique Paganism into the high romance of the Christian mood, you cannot but present it as a drama wherein you show an inception, an action, a conclusion arrived at. Would you describe a battle? Even though the action be inconclusive you must make its very lack of conclusion a sort of catastrophe. A river is not a river without banks nor an object an object without contour, nor anything a thing save through form. A thing is itself because it is one; and unity—the principle of existence—will not be maintained in any story unless that story proceeds upon a plan consonant to the rational soul of man.

So let me conclude by a phrase, strange, perhaps, in modern ears. History is not history unless it be inspired with the teleological spirit, unless there be running through it an end which the whole business conspires to produce: a final cause. Let us praise, therefore, those books of history from which we rise saying to ourselves: 'Now I see how

that great fall came about', or, 'I am fed: for I am filled with the knowledge of how this good which I have so long admired was brought into the world, established, and completed'. Even if this effect upon us is reached by a false tale, that false tale presents a quality which true tales also must have if they are to be tales at all.

But this prime character in history, that it is a story, that every effort in the writing of history must be the presentation of a dramatic action, does not mean that the action should be in that special form implied by the word 'drama' used in a limited sense.

Here is a distinction subtle and difficult to follow, but unavoidably necessary to right judgement in our inquiry. To select the material in an historical presentation so that it shall lead like an acted play to a particular final scene, to omit essentials which make reality elaborate and to prefer the simplicity of a single thread to the organic complexity of life, is to fall from history into fiction. Therefore true history will never be as it were a spear thrust, but rather a piece of carving. There must be present in history the air of multitude. It must have unity: but the unity of a frieze.

The story must live, as must all stories to be stories indeed, but it must live through something manifold in the corporate actions of men rather than through that cleanly individual life which attaches to one plot and to an isolated fortune. It must live by the power of numbers, in a foison of motive and with the admission of what drama, strictly so-called, eliminates—imperfect deed, ambition half-fulfilled and half-frustrated, enigmas unsolved, contradictions unreconciled; nor, as a shallow judgement might pronounce, do such admissions destroy the strong oneness of the affair.



## III

The story told must be true—and here again we will not linger upon the futility of those who are proud to publish exercises in the self-evident truth that the human mind can only perceive some infinitesimal part or fraction of reality. Here again we use common sense and know what we mean when we say that a relation is true or false. Let us rather admit that all men know the meaning of that word 'truth' and consider what is practical to our purpose: the enemies of truth in history.

There are two such enemies, diverse in character. The one is ignorance, the other advocacy.

Ignorance is of two kinds, an ignorance of proportion and an ignorance of such facts as a sense of proportion will discover to be of primary importance.

For instance: a man who makes Drake and Hawkins the outstanding figures in the reign of Elizabeth is ignorant of right proportion. A man who sees that Cecil was the master of the time has proportion: but if he does not know that Cecil was a new man he is ignorant of an essential fact.

All truth lies in proportion; for it is clear that complete reality cannot be known by limited beings, and that even in the most restricted field there are an infinite number (millions upon millions, and more millions of millions) of facts which the examiner of that field cannot know. Further, in what he knows selection must be made—for had you to write down the events of one waking hour in your life, with all the little that you know of cause and effect in its composition, your whole lifetime would not suffice for the task. Bad judgement, that is, a false notion, proceeds, then, from lack of proportion. In order to make

a true relation of any character or event, proportion in the factors of that event or character, the putting of the first things first and the sacrificing of the lesser to the greater, is the very maker of truth; that is, of the recognition of reality.

I see far off a tree. I say, by its shape, colour and habit, that it is an elm. I cannot count the leaves, nor distinguish them at such a distance. I come so near that I can see every leaf, yet I do not tell a greater truth nor even a fuller one by describing every leaf. It is sufficient that I repeat, 'This is an elm' and proportion exists in relation to that which has been told. Again, if I am telling the true story of a crime in the discovery of which decisive events turned upon the fact that a certain tree was an elm and not an oak, then I lack proportion if I call it 'a tree', at large, omitting that it was an elm. But if the events of the crime did not concern the tree at all but turned upon a particular date, then to neglect the date and to emphasize a tree in the neighbourhood for the sake of the picture only is an error in proportion: serviceable in fiction, a blemish in history. Similarly, if I am writing the *military* history of a battle and miss the essential manoeuvres in order to give space for praising the virtue of the troops, my proportion is at fault.

Now, ignorance of proportion being the form of ignorance which most warps history, there is also that other form of ignorance that, while we recognize the first things to be first, we are not sufficiently instructed upon them. Thus I may be familiar with the truth that in the miserable decline of the English monarchy to its extinction in the seventeenth century, the chief cause was the decline of revenue due to the Crown, and the corresponding increase of income among the great landlords, who set out

to kill kingship and substitute their own rule for that of the monarch. I have my proportion right. But if I have not studied what the revenue of the Crown was, nor can tell my readers why it so declined, then my approach to reality in that connection suffers from ignorance of essential fact.

If ignorance of proportion be the main form of ignorance causing false history, and ignorance of some one element, though recognized to be important, the second form, and if ignorance of either sort, or of both combined, be fatal to the historian, there is also that other worse poison, advocacy. In a society where men are trained to advocacy, and where it leads to the highest fortunes or, what is worse, to the highest repute, truth fails. It is an error that advocacy upon the one side balances advocacy on the other and that reality is found in the result of the contest. Advocacy is the negation of truth.

Now all humanity, being subject to affection, must be tempted to advocacy; and it may be justly said that every historian is in some degree affected by this vice. Yet is it true that in proportion as he escapes it is the historian worthy of his trade. Thomas Wentworth, first Lord Strafford, deserted his colleagues; having gone so far with his own class of great landlords against the power of the king of England he went no farther; he abandoned at a certain moment opposition to the Crown and engaged in that for which he knew himself to be well fitted, the active task of government. Many motives were at work upon him. The death of Buckingham (a rival and enemy) gave him his opportunity. In some degree he desired revenge. In some degree he desired to exercise those great talents which made him chafe under the lack of opportunity. In some degree he was disgusted with the lack of sincerity

and the bombastic rhetoric of such colleagues as Elliot and reacted against them. Writing truth of that one man lies in establishing the right proportion between these diverse motives. If I fall into abusing him as a traitor I sink to the vulgar level of Whig pamphleteering, but then if I make out all his motives good or—what is worse—pretend that their good or evil does not matter but only their efficiency for government, I am, by lack of moral proportion, falling into the opposite error; though my eulogy may not be as foolish, it is as untrue as a Whig diatribe.

Right judgement in all such matters proceeds, not from the cataloguing of the various forces at work, admitting the plus and admitting the minus, but by a combination of imagination and knowledge, getting as it were into the skin of the man so long dead, looking through his eyes and feeling his own ardours and self-reproaches, and his own self-justifications. Since you cannot judge history as God must judge it, judge it at least through the conscience which you share with all men and which is of God. But never let an historian cheat himself with the secret plea that if he by his advocacy falsifies to the left some other man will falsify to the right, and that so a balance will be struck. Let him make modification of his every phrase until the whole effect correspond to the vision of the past he has called up in his mind.

At the base of such a task there is necessary a right philosophy, and therefore is it justly said that without a true philosophy—that is, a true religion—true history cannot be written.

#### IV

The last member of the definition is this. The historian writes, he does not preach or sing. His function is not a

function of rhetoric or poetry, it is a function of prose. But prose, perhaps the greatest of human arts, is singularly impatient of perfection. What is prose? It is the conveyance of that which is in the mind of the writer to the mind of the reader so that between the two there shall be, as much as is possible, an exact correspondence; this is what is meant by the golden definition that lucidity is the soul of prose. Herein we have one of those many cunning traps which the nature of the outer world sets for the nature of man. The inexperienced will think that to be lucid is the commonest of qualities in written expression, and that good prose or great prose is good or great through its poignancy or through the matter with which it deals, or from the violence or vividness of the picture it summons to the mind. Manifestly this is not so. Good rhetoric and good poetry are good in this fashion, but not good prose; and that prose is greatest which is most good, that is, most consonant to its end; but the end of prose is expression—nothing more. Yet how mightily difficult! See how rare are those who hardly find an obstacle to expression and in whom lucidity arises native like an inspiration!

If this be true of all prose it is true more particularly of the prose of the historian. His network of threads must never become a tangle; he cannot relieve the strain upon his pen by calling in the aid of fancy. There is ever present before him that vast inconsequence of things as they are in the real world which he must none the less reduce to consequence or fail in his task of telling a story. At every step will he be tempted to interpolate, to except, to weary the reader with hesitation, to attempt conviction through repetition; in no department of authorship is there so great a temptation to ease the burden by a false

simplification, nor in any is there need for so multiple a grasp. It has been compared (has the writing of historical prose) to the driving of many horses in one team. It is far more involved than that! It is the driving of many horses and of some few oxen, and of here and there tigers, and of attempting to yoke with them eagles as well, so that an element of flight may be added to the strength or agility of what must tread the solid ground. With all this there is little reward for the labour done. No man perhaps has achieved fame through the telling of historical truth: no man, certainly, has achieved wealth thereby.

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With that last sentence in my mind, let me conclude with a brief consideration of what I said at my outset I would postpone: the matter of motive.

Why, then, do men write history? If it is as advocates, they are, as historians, worthless. If it is to excite strong feeling through their craft as does the poet or the rhetorician, they are the less historians. If it is to show their skill in the solution of problems they are beneath the level of their calling and resemble men who, having the duty of defending their honour by the sword, think rather of how they shall be praised for their fencing.

The true spring of action for the historian is this: that there lies in man a certain God-given necessity for communicating to his fellow men that reality of which he has become possessed. Just as God (if the word may still be used) has put it into the hearts, especially of young men, to desire fame, in order that the work of the world may be done, and has spurred on with other necessities lovers, martyrs, and sailors to new worlds, so in this poor but noble sobriety of history you have an inspiring force. It



is the inspiration not of fame nor of this human ideal or that vision of the divine. It is only the inspiration of the thing discovered, urging its human instrument to give it outward expression and to establish it in the general mind.

Nor let it be forgotten that there is mixed up with this strong and permanent motive a motive of civic virtue. For history is to society what memory is to a man, and only by true record do nations know themselves.

MARCUS CHEKE

## THE ROYAL PALACE HOTEL

The birthday of the Emperor of China fell upon the third Tuesday in June. On this day, according to immemorial custom, the Emperor used to sit enthroned on a small green hill bright with flowers, set in the midst of a vast plain. And here he would graciously receive the gifts of his subjects, who could be seen streaming over the plain from every point of the compass, as far as the eye could see.

On the thirtieth birthday of the reign, the morning sky was limpid and serene. The Emperor himself was in a peculiarly happy mood when, surrounded by a numerous suite, he took his place upon the little hill, for a display of fireworks had been planned for that evening. The gifts he received, too, were particularly handsome. His uncle, the Prince of Manchuria, brought him twenty white swans that had been nourished on ladybirds in the mountains of Tibet. His great-aunt, the Dowager Queen of Ispahan, presented him with a pair of tiny dogs who could play the flute and swing on small trapezes.

But at four o'clock in the evening a cloud became visible in the west, and a dry, hot wind began to rustle in the robes of the Imperial suite.

'This is exceedingly annoying,' whispered the Emperor as he bowed in acknowledgement of the presentation of a perfect peony, 'a storm would be contrary to all precedent.'

As he spoke, the cloud approached at a terrific speed. In another moment it was hovering like a hawk over the

heads of the courtiers, who observed that it was peopled with demons. In the centre of the cloud stood a wizard, in a yellow robe spangled with black crabs. A deathly silence pervaded the air. Then one of the demons, who appeared to be a kind of herald, began speaking down a megaphone.

‘To the unrivalled gifts which his Imperial Majesty has received on the auspicious occasion of his birthday, our master, with profound humility, begs to add a present which he has brought from the ends of the world to the steps of the Imperial throne.’ At these words a horde of winged demons placed at the foot of the hill seven motor-cars. Then the cloud, with all its attendants, vanished as quickly as it had come. The Emperor and his courtiers were speechless. A motor-car had never before been seen within the boundaries of the Empire. The first was a Rolls-Royce, the second an Hispano-Suisa, the third a Mercedes, the fourth a Sunbeam, the fifth an Isotta; the sixth was a Delage, and the last an Austin Seven. There were also some rather gaudy petrol pumps and a large book of instructions.

‘The incident is unprecedented,’ commented the Emperor. ‘What do you suppose that these seven objects are?’ And he turned to his Marshal.

‘Possibly they are musical instruments of some sort,’ suggested the Marshal.

‘There must be an Imperial Commission to inquire into the matter,’ continued the Emperor, ‘I shall desire personally to read their report. Come! It is the hour for the fireworks. I am hoping that there are to be Burmese Bombs.’

The report of the Commission was eagerly awaited. When it at length appeared, it proved to be entirely favourable to the Emperor accepting the wizard’s gift. It

even went so far as to propose expenditure for the erection of Imperial garages. And in less than three weeks the Emperor had become a keen motorist. True, he objected to any of the engines being started, and could not be persuaded to do more than occasionally to use one of the automobiles as a kind of toboggan; but hardly a day went by without the Emperor seating himself in his Hispano, while courtiers held up before him a series of landscapes executed by the foremost artists of the day, thus giving him the illusion of constant motion without his having to suffer the sound of the machines, which he found disquieting. The erection of the Imperial garages was at once begun, and formed the sole subject of fashionable conversation.

Now, the Emperor had a single daughter, a daughter of fifteen summers, whose beauty was so marvellous that no flower in the gardens of the Imperial Palace could be compared to her. Her father loved her above all his possessions. He was never happy unless she was by his side. None of her wishes had he ever refused, and he would cause poets to be brought from the furthest corners of his realm that they might bring a smile to her lips. This Princess began to long to drive her father's Austin Seven. And one evening she broached the subject to him.

'I was thinking,' she began, 'how delightful it would be if I could learn to drive the Austin Seven——'

The Emperor started at her words and arrested her sentence by a gesture of the hand.

'Impossible!' he exclaimed, 'it would be contrary to all precedent. The question is closed.'

But the question was not closed at all. To no avail did the Emperor offer his daughter anything she cared to mention in the length and breadth of the land; to no avail

he implored her to accept the rarest birds in his aviary. The Princess had set her heart upon the Austin Seven, and, at last, to cut a long story short, the Emperor relented, distracted by her tears. He insisted only that the Princess should always be accompanied on her drives by a chauffeur.

When the next birthday of the Emperor approached, there was much curiosity as to whether the wizard would again make an appearance. When the courtiers stood surrounding the throne on the little hill, more than one eye was seen to turn furtively to the west. And, true enough, in the course of the evening, the magic cloud appeared in the sky and came to rest hovering above the throne. The courtiers were able to recognize the demons seated on it, and the wizard in the midst of them. And again the herald spoke down a megaphone:

‘To the unrivalled gifts which his Imperial Majesty has received on the auspicious occasion of his birthday, our master, with profound humility, begs to add a present which he has brought from the ends of the world to the steps of the Imperial throne. Our master has ordered to be installed in the palace two electric moving staircases.’ The wizard was seen to make a low obeisance. Then, at a wave from his glass walking-stick, the cloud vanished over the horizon.

The new staircases caused a great sensation. But the young Princess did not seem to be as much enthralled by them as were the others of the Court. Her interest centred, to an ever-increasing extent, round her father’s Austin Seven. Hardly a day went by, now, without her making some excursion.

Now the chauffeur of the Austin Seven, who always drove the little car on these occasions, was the humblest

member of the staff of the Imperial garages. He was a lad called Li-Tsin, a year older than the Princess, and of somewhat mysterious antecedents. He had one day arrived on foot at the palace, having come from a distant land, and had applied for a post about the Court. He proved to be extremely intelligent in all matters relating to motor-cars, and as the Imperial chauffeurs were all very lazy, being merely favourites of the government in power, he had made himself indispensable to them. The Imperial chauffeurs allowed Li-Tsin to superintend the whole of the garage, and to do all the hard work, while they themselves, gloating over their opulent salaries, were eating and sleeping in their sumptuous villas. Li-Tsin bore their contempt patiently. For him his difficult life was amply recompensed by the privilege he enjoyed of driving the Princess. The conversations which took place between them were long and interesting. Li-Tsin would allow the Princess herself to take the wheel, while he sat by her side, or ran along the road shouting praise. Sometimes they would motor out to a hillside where they used to recline on a mossy bank beneath a cherry tree. At their feet a little brook ran down into the valley, and the air was filled with the songs of birds.

When the Emperor's birthday came round again, talk of the possible appearance of the wizard was in everybody's mouth. What new thing, people wondered, would the wizard bring this year as a gift?

The Emperor, with the Princess at his side, took his place on the little hill, according to tradition, and the day was spent in receiving the gifts of his subjects. Then, when evening came, a shout from the populace announced that the wizard's cloud had been sighted. The cloud drew near, and the herald spoke:



'To the unrivalled gifts which his Imperial Majesty has received on the occasion of his birthday, our master, with profound humility, begs to add a present which he has brought from the ends of the world to the steps of the Imperial throne. It is a present more admirable than either of those which His Majesty has already deigned to accept from our master's hand. It is a Royal Palace Hotel.'

At these words the wizard made a gesture with his wand, and, to the amazement of all beholders, a fantastic building in white concrete, fourteen stories high, surrounded by a terrace, appeared in the sky in front of the Emperor. The building was resting in mid-air upon a cloud. Its front was lined with rows of countless windows. Although the hotel was at least a mile away, it was easy to see every detail on its terrace, which was apparently crowded with American visitors taking tea. And the strains of a music new to the ears of the courtiers were wafted through the clear evening air:

'My Baby don't care for shows  
My Baby don't care for clothes,  
My Baby just cares for me!'

The distant throb of a jazz band and the wail of saxophones drifted down from the hotel.

The Emperor was perfectly enchanted. 'Your generosity,' he said, addressing the wizard, 'eclipses that of all the princes of history.'

'I have come,' replied the wizard, speaking now for the first time, 'to ask you for the hand of your daughter in marriage.'

These words gave rise to widespread consternation. The Princess turned pale. The Emperor exchanged

whispers with his ministers. It was evident that he was much displeased. At last he instructed his Chamberlain to make reply to the wizard in the following diplomatic words:

‘His Imperial Majesty had hoped that you would to-day deign to accept from him a gift as a sign of his gratitude and friendship. He regrets that you should have asked him for the single thing which it is not in his power to give.’

The wizard’s face clouded and a distant roll of thunder echoed over the plain. The courtiers became aware of a faint smell of sulphur.

‘I desire the hand of the Princess in marriage,’ repeated the wizard. ‘If you gratify my wish the Royal Palace Hotel is yours. I shall give you a week in which to decide. If you thwart me’—here the wizard raised an arm in a gesture of warning—‘beware of my revenge!’

Another clap of thunder followed. The wizard made a gesture in the air with his wand, and at once the Royal Palace Hotel, its terraces and its American visitors, vanished like a dream. Storm clouds gathered overhead. The heavens were in a tumult.

The Emperor coldly gave the order that the Court was to return to the palace.

During the course of the next week the wizard was not inactive. He caused the Royal Palace Hotel to appear more than once in the sky, hoping to stimulate in the Emperor the desire to possess it. One day he made it alight upon the slopes of a neighbouring mountain, whereupon the Emperor promptly ordered his army to capture it. With colours flying, the army advanced up the hill, but long before the soldiers were in a position to

storm the terrace the wizard had carried the hotel away. Demons delivered glowing prospectuses of the hotel in all the letter-boxes; but the Emperor remained adamant. The wizard was furious. He could only spare two days in which to organize storms of lightning, because he had to go to New York, where he was expected to create a panic on Wall Street, but he left behind him some of his minions, to whom he gave detailed instructions.

All these incidents were most upsetting for the Imperial Court. But when two months had passed without further disturbances, things began to resume a normal appearance. And one sunny day the Emperor decided that he would give the darling Princess a special treat. He would take her for a run in the Rolls.

The drive was certainly delicious. The country was full of blossom. The car swept through villages and over latticed bridges hung with flowers; past temples and monasteries, and through painted gateways. The Emperor became quickly accustomed to the unusual speed. He held the Princess's hand, while he tempted her with sugared almonds dipped in pistachio jam. Sometimes they would skirt the banks of a river, and catch sight of fishermen as immobile as stone gods, and the car would put up the wild geese from the marshes. Sometimes they would pass through luxuriant woods peopled with shrieking parrots. At five o'clock in the evening they were again amongst the woods which lay behind the Imperial Palace. The Emperor expressed himself delighted with the run. At that moment the Rolls came to a standstill at the side of the road, and the footman announced through the window that there was a puncture.

'This is exceedingly annoying,' observed the Emperor. 'How long will it take to change the wheel?'

The chauffeur, who was one of the senior officials of the garage, replied that it was a question of only a few minutes.

'Then we will alight,' said the Emperor, and he stepped heavily from the car. The footman spread a carpet upon a grassy bank, and here the Emperor reclined.

'I am not impatient,' he observed, and he took a sugar almond from his little jar.

'And I will walk up the hill and pick some white violets for you,' cried the little Princess.

Promising to return in two or three minutes, she began scrambling up the hillside. Then she plunged into a little dell fringed with hazel and broom. She thought that she had never in her life seen a dell so pretty.

All of a sudden, she noticed that the place was enveloped in a white mountain mist. She turned round, and realized that she was not sure by which way she had come. The mist thickened: she could see nothing now but the ground at her feet. She walked on, stumbling over the roots of trees, branches clinging to her dress, till the brushwood cleared and she presumed that she was safely out of the dell. But which was the way back to the Rolls? Suddenly she felt her foot on hard smooth stone, and she saw to her astonishment that she had lit upon a flight of steps. She ran up them without heeding. Then, before she knew where she was, she felt a terrible sensation of the ground rising under her feet. In another moment she had fallen in a swoon upon the ground.

What had happened was this: the wizard had ordered three of his demons to watch the palace of the Emperor of China and to take advantage of the first opportunity to carry off the Princess. For two months they had waited without success. But when they had noticed that the

Princess was to go for a motor-drive, the demons had scattered a part of the road with nails. Then, when the Princess had wandered from the car, they had brought the Royal Palace Hotel to the hillside. The rest was easy. Once the Princess, losing her way, had set her foot on the terrace of the magic hotel, the demons lifted it thousands of feet above the surface of the earth. And there the demons suspended the hotel immobile on the lip of a cloud, according to the wizard's orders.

When the Princess came to, she found herself lying beside a white balustrade, while a stranger was bending over her with his hand on her pulse.

'Oh! Where am I?' cried the Princess.

'You are at the Royal Palace Hotel,' answered the stranger kindly. 'If you are the Princess of China, as I presume you to be, you must not be alarmed. You are expected. I understand that a suite of rooms has been reserved for you.'

'Who are you?' asked the Princess.

'Allow me to introduce myself,' said the stranger, 'I am the Sultan of Bagdad. I am staying here.'

At this moment the Princess cast a glance over the balustrade, and a cry of distress escaped her lips. Far, far below her the earth lay stretched out like a map. She could see her father's palace set amidst its wide gardens; and yes, there was her father himself, directly below her, sitting beside the Rolls, which looked no bigger than a raspberry. The Emperor must have been still unaware of his daughter's fate. With his customary dignity he was reclining, propped up on cushions, eating sugar almonds. The Princess felt her eyes filling with tears. She asked the Sultan for a pencil and a piece of paper. She wrote a note which she wrapped round one of her rings, and this she

threw over the balustrade. She watched it flutter down into the depths of the blue evening air. Then she accepted the Sultan's arm and together they made their way into the hotel.

At the Imperial Court of China soon all was consternation and confusion. The army was mobilized, without anyone knowing whether or no an invasion was contemplated. In the Palace the Emperor sat all day closeted with his ministers. The note which the Princess had thrown over the balustrade had been found, but neither the commander-in-chief of the Emperor's armies, nor the Minister of the Interior, nor any of the Imperial astronomers, could produce a practical plan for rescuing the Princess.

Hanging at an immeasurable height above the earth could be seen the magic hotel. All day its white concrete and its rows of plate-glass windows sparkled like a jewel in the sky. By night the hotel was brilliantly illuminated. The Emperor would peer at it through a long telescope, and note down all signs of life on it. He observed that at four o'clock, and again after dinner, the hotel band usually played upon the terrace. And if the night was very still he would fancy, sometimes, that his ear caught the far-off sounds of mysterious music:

'Ah wouldn't be where Ah am,  
 Feelin' lak Ah am,  
 Doin' what Ah am,  
 Ef you hadn't gone away.'



Then the Emperor would order another council of war, and command the astronomers to be brought into his presence. All their plans proved vain, and the Emperor's heart began to grow very heavy. At last he ordered



couriers to depart into the farthest corners of the world to seek aid. He offered a reward to anyone who could invent a means of rescuing the Princess. The reward was to be as much treasure as could be carried from the palace by forty slaves in the space of a lunar month.

Meanwhile, at the Royal Palace Hotel, the Princess was enjoying a life very different to the one that she had been accustomed to. The visitors to the hotel were wealthy, and cosmopolitan. The air was most invigorating, and the views magnificent. One rose at eleven, and lunched at two o'clock. The afternoon was spent on the terrace, though many preferred ski-ing on one of the neighbouring clouds. In the evening there was always a *thé dansant*, and after dinner a ball, or a game of bridge. But although the Princess joined in the various amusements of the hotel, she could not regard her luxurious suite of rooms as other than a prison. No day passed without her spending many hours with a pair of binoculars, watching all that was going on at her father's palace. She marked the incessant coming and going of couriers and officers of state, and the daily training of the army. With even greater interest would she gaze into the courtyard of the Imperial garages, and try to distinguish Li-Tsin amongst the officials swarming there. The manager of the hotel assured her repeatedly that it was impossible to bring the building to the ground without the permission of the wizard, who alone understood the mechanism that suspended it in the air. The Princess realized that there was nothing to be done but to be patient, and to hope that her father's army would soon discover a way of rescuing her.

The couriers dispatched by the Emperor of China stirred up the interest of the outside world in the affairs

of the Imperial Court. The singularity of the problem involved, as well as the fabulous reward offered, excited the amazement and the ambition of four continents; and in New York, in Paris, and Berlin, companies were quickly formed with the aim of rescuing the Princess, and their shares quoted daily on the exchanges. The ingenuity of scientists was now being put to the test. No day went by without the arrival at the Court of China of new hordes of inventors, astronomers and mechanics. Every road was blocked with lorries carrying dismantled aeroplanes or balloons. There was no adventurer in the world who did not decide that here was an opportunity to make his fortune. And with them came newspaper reporters, cinema operators, missionaries, contractors, hot-dog-stall keepers. An impoverished Russian Count bicycled across Asia.

The Emperor of China found life increasingly difficult. If the hopes held out by the foreigners that the rescue of the Princess was feasible were a real consolation, yet the disturbance of all traditional behaviour at Court was continually upsetting. He was pestered every minute of the day for press interviews; and when the reporters retired from his presence it was with none of the elaborate dignity which the Emperor loved. They would dash pell-mell from the throne-room, and fight their way to the telephone boxes which had been installed in one of the ante-chambers, where lines were kept permanently open with the capitals of the world. When the Emperor went for a walk he would hear the low whirr of a camera concealed amongst the tamarisks. His peacocks began to grow wilder. And the feuds between the various Rescue Companies were an additional embarrassment. He used to find himself buttonholed by loud-voiced managing directors demanding some concession. There was especially the

most bitter rivalry as to which company should be allowed the first attempt at rescue. So one day the Emperor summoned all the directors, the inventors, the mechanics: all, indeed, who had come to China with the single aim of winning the promised reward. He then told them that he had long pondered over how to be fair towards all the competitors; he had finally decided that in four days time it should be open to all to put their plans simultaneously into operation.

Accordingly, on the fourth day after this speech, the plain to the south of the palace, a space reserved customarily for military reviews, presented a remarkable scene. It was black with people. Here and there could be seen a busy swarm of mechanics attending to an aeroplane, bright like silver. A multitude of inquisitive spectators surrounded the balloons and the single airship. Others thronged round the Russian Count. He had harnessed a covey of Mongolian partridges to a shallow wicker basket, in which he reposed. He held a baton, and a round copper gong, intending by this means to startle the birds into flight.

At a given signal, up went the balloons, the aeroplanes, and the airship. In a few minutes time the aeroplanes could be seen circling like birds round the hotel, but it was obvious that they would find great difficulty in landing. The balloons had a better chance of success, but were difficult to steer. The airship was to manoeuvre into position above the hotel and let down a rope ladder on to the roof of the building. The Emperor of China, his eye glued to his telescope, his heart throbbing with excitement, watched the dirigible mount slowly into the air.

Suddenly he heard a sound like the breaking of a wave,

vibrating up from the plain where the crowd was standing breathless. It was the echo of a groan of horror from ten thousand throats. Almost instantaneously the Emperor saw that the sky was darkening. A flash of lightning for a moment blinded him. He groped his way to the door of his apartment and passed down a staircase into the gardens. Here he found his courtiers prostrated with fear. Shading his eyes he looked upwards and he uttered a cry of dismay. He saw the aeroplanes and the balloons spinning like leaves in a monstrous whirlwind above him; while far above them again, at treble its former height, looking now no larger than a die, was the Royal Palace Hotel.

For demons had flown swiftly to the wizard to warn him of the impending rescue of the Princess of China. The wizard, though then at that time deeply involved in politics in Mexico, had at once mounted a storm cloud, and had travelled across the Pacific Ocean. On arrival at the scene of rescue he had immediately darkened the earth with the shadow of a tempest, and had lifted the Royal Palace Hotel into the very vault of the sky, at a height far above any possible attack.

Six months passed. The Princess began to despair of ever seeing her home again. At the Imperial Palace the Court had been commanded to go into mourning and the fountains had been stopped playing. It seemed now that unless the marriage between the Princess and the wizard took place, the atmosphere of weariness and despair would never be broken.

One morning, however, when the Emperor was sitting, as was now his wont, alone in his chamber, it was announced to him that a lad was without who craved for audience. And when the Emperor had consented to his

being admitted, there was ushered into his presence a youth whom he could not remember ever having seen before. It was Li-Tsin, the chauffeur to the Austin Seven.

'Your mission?' asked the Emperor.

'I have at last discovered a plan for rescuing the Princess from the Royal Palace Hotel,' answered the boy boldly.

'Hundreds of plans have already been suggested, or have actually been put into operation,' sighed the Emperor, 'but none has yet met with success.'

'I am not daunted,' said Li-Tsin.

'And your project?'

'I have succeeded in constructing a rocket,' replied the lad, 'and to-night I propose to seat myself on it, and to be shot into the sky. When I have reached the hotel——'

'A rocket!' exclaimed the Emperor, 'the idea is brilliant.'

'On my arrival at the hotel,' went on Li-Tsin, 'I shall find the Princess, and we shall descend by means of a parachute.'

The Emperor remained silent for a moment. Then: 'You are certainly young enough to be lucky,' he said with a smile.

At ten o'clock that night Li-Tsin wheeled into the open the rocket which he had been secretly making during the course of many weeks. It was eleven feet long, and as thick as a pillar-box. The attempt was to be kept as secret as possible for fear of news of it reaching the wizard's ears. Li-Tsin took with him, besides his parachute, a thermos flask filled with hot tea and a few cucumber sandwiches. Then, when he had shaken hands with a number of trusty friends who had come to wish him farewell, he mounted the rocket, which was already

pointing in the right direction, and put a match to the fuse. There was suddenly a splitting roar of exploding gunpowder, and the rocket screamed upwards towards the stars.

For several minutes Li-Tsin was in danger of losing his nerve, so terrible was the speed at which he found himself travelling through the air. He looked over his shoulder and caught sight of the pinprick lights of the Imperial Palace receding rapidly into the darkness. Above him, the hotel seemed already to have grown in size. Ten minutes more, and he could distinguish its illuminated front. The rocket was travelling well, and far exceeding his wildest hopes. Now it was beginning to lose something of its initial impetus, and travelling on it was less difficult than in the first rush of air. In another moment, before he realized where he was, Li-Tsin had been dropped quietly on to the roof of the hotel.

He stepped off the burnt-out cartridge of the rocket and looked around him. He was aware of music playing somewhere beneath his feet; and yes, here was a dormer window through which he might gain access to the body of the building. Li-Tsin squeezed through the window, crossed what must have been a servant's bedroom, and came out on to a carpeted passage in front of a staircase. The sound of music was distinctly louder. He began to creep down the stairs, and he passed no fewer than four landings, each with their corridors of numbered doors, before he met anybody. He was warned by hearing a sound of humming, and had just time enough in which to retreat into an alcove holding a palm. The person who had alarmed him passed within a few inches of him, and he was somewhat astonished when this person emerged into view. It was an elderly woman. She was wearing a



yellow silk turban and a Turkish costume covered in beads, and she was holding a cardboard scimitar. Hardly had she disappeared down the staircase when there approached along the corridor a bearded man who looked like an anarchist, for he carried a bomb. The anarchist rang for the lift. Only after Li-Tsin had descended nine further flights of steps and had gained a glimpse of the hotel lounge, did he understand the meaning of these apparitions. A fancy-dress ball was in full swing. The rooms were crowded with people in every variety of extravagant costume. There were gipsy queens and Pompadours, pirates and pierrots, milkmaids and bandits. Cardinal Wolsey, encumbered by his robes, was dancing with a girl dressed as Little Lord Fauntleroy. The Sultan of Bagdad was disguised as the Grand Monarch.

But who among all these people was the Princess of China? In one respect at least, Fortune was favouring Li-Tsin, for his appearance caused no curiosity. He was regarded as one of the visitors in some kind of fancy dress. He was standing hesitating as to whether he should ask somebody for a dance, and scrutinizing the motley riot of disguises, when he felt a touch on his arm, and turning round, he found himself looking down into the eyes of the Princess, transfigured with joy.

For the Princess to lead Li-Tsin to a quiet place, and for him to relate how he had arrived at the hotel, was the work of a moment. The Princess promised to do all that Li-Tsin might require of her, saying that no risk was too great for her to face with his protection. And so, when the dawn broke, Li-Tsin and the Princess stole away from the ball (they had danced all the night through) and went out on to the terrace of the hotel. Li-Tsin lifted the Princess

in his arms, and, opening his parachute, stepped over the balustrade.

Thus the Princess of China was at last rescued from the magic Palace Hotel, which vanished from sight for ever, and welcomed home. And in the middle of the great banquet which was given to celebrate her return, an embassy arrived from Mongolia in quest of the heir-apparent of that kingdom, who had vanished from the country three years earlier, and had not yet been found. This embassy had passed through all the lands of Europe without finding its lost prince, and was now traversing China on its way to Japan. And it was discovered that Li-Tsin, who had served as a chauffeur in the Imperial garages, was in reality the Crown Prince of Mongolia, who, tired of the pomp of courts, had wandered to China in order to gain a sight of the Princess, of whose fabulous beauty he had heard.

Li-Tsin and the Princess were married, and the Emperor presented them with a summer house built of coral and jade, set upon an island in a lake. The lake was covered with red and white water-lilies, and stocked with gold and silver carp.

## READERS' REPORTS

*Egil's Saga: done into English out of the Icelandic, by E. R. Eddison. (Cambridge University Press. 18s.)* In all respects but one—and the exception is a matter of opinion—this is an admirable presentation of a fine original. The Introduction is just what is required to put the story against its proper background, social and psychological; the notes and tables are sufficient and not excessive. Altogether, I think it comes nearer to an adequate version of a saga than anything since Dasent's *Burnt Njal*. By which one implies, what is the truth, that no version hitherto is quite satisfactory.

'They gat them conveyance till they came to meet the Earl, and say unto him their ill faring.' This sentence is an example of the trap—call it fallacy or convention—into which almost every translator from the Icelandic falls. Like the language which Morris invented for the same purpose, it is an abstraction. Speak thus or write did none Englishman ever. English does not jump about from the past to the historic present in one sentence; *came to meet the Earl* does not mean *came to where the Earl was*; *say unto him* brings in a different, a Biblical, tone. The sentence is out of focus, and a style like this does not convey, rather it masks, the peculiar lucidity and naturalness of Icelandic prose. It imports the flavour of Ye Olde Petrolle Pumpe into the draught at once. To those who know the original it is a distortion: to those who do not, it is an exasperation.

Mr. Eddison has adopted this style on deliberation, and given his grounds for it. He says, very justly, that Laing is often heavy and lifeless. It is when he adds that Morris

is, by comparison, living human speech, that he seems to me to go astray.

'Earl Sigurd came and made peace among them, by asking the King to hold his mouth over the handle of the kettle upon which the fat smoke of the boiled horseflesh had settled itself.'

Certainly that is flat. But a very slight alteration: 'the handle of the kettle where the greasy smoke had settled' would make it the kind of English which we all use in describing a scene we have witnessed. But now take Morris.

'Then strove Earl Sigurd to appease them, and bade them lay the storm; but the King he bade gape over a kettle-bow, whereas the reek of seething had gone up from the horseflesh so that the kettle-bow was all greasy.'

Stevenson rebuked Morris for saying *whereas* when he meant *where*. But no changes will make English of that sentence. It is simply ventriloquism.

I know the difficulties are immense. What is a translator to do with a language, for example, which can get the picture of a moonlight night with scudding clouds in five words: *was moon and drove over*? But before pronouncing them insuperable (I speak as one who has tried and failed entirely to satisfy himself), I think some translator should make the experiment of assimilating the popular narrative English which he will find scattered up and down our sixteenth-century records. There are no sagas in English. But in the State Papers, Acts of the Privy Council, Assize Records, old county histories, there are *thaettir*, as an Iclander would have called them, in plenty. The story of Arden of Faversham, in Holinshed, is one: the death of Amy Robsart is another. The mad feud of Lord Stourton, with his steward on one side and the

Herberts on the other: the steward beleaguered in the church tower while his son rode to London to beg aid from the Council, the gates of Wilton, where Stourton's trumpets had always sounded defiance, shut against the messenger bringing the Queen's pardon, until execution had been done, would in Iceland have made a magnificent saga. I wish Mr. Eddison would try the experiment. He has come so near to success that I think another time he might bring it off altogether.

*The Back-to-Backs*, by J. C. Grant. (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d.) Mr. Liam O'Flaherty, in a preface, calls *The Back-to-Backs* 'a terrible warning to every thinking man'. By this curiously curate-like phrase he puts it on a level, so to speak, with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. And he goes on to thunder, in effect: 'If you do not think this a good novel, you are a coward and a jellyfish'. However, it is not a good novel. In fact, it is hardly a novel at all. The story is negligible and openly neglected; the characters at their best are only fair. As a 'warning' it suffers from its nightmarish abstraction; as a work of art it is distorted by shrieking, and by evident and almost literally successful attempts to make the reader sick. But though a poor novel it is a remarkable book, and Mr. O'Flaherty, making a stand for it on moral grounds, does it injustice. It is—to leave its accuracy as a 'warning' on one side—the work of a crude and wildly romantic imagination. Hagger is no ordinary mining village, it is a nightmare in the void; this evocation of it is not plain description or straightforward narrative, but a violent and horrible poem. It welters in horrors that make Titus Andronicus look tame; but, after all, horrors are easy. Most of them do the book more harm than good. But its atmosphere is

remarkably intense; its style curt and vigorous; and its excesses proceed not merely from a crude exploiting of the frightful, but from a confused and passionate idealism. If only Mr. Grant does not set too much store by the outcries of the orthodox, or Mr. O'Flaherty's applause!

*The Horses of the Conquest*, by R. B. Cunninghame Graham. (Heinemann. 8s. 6d.) There were no horses in South America till the Spaniards brought them: this is an account of the horses they brought. Contemporary historians, though horse-loving, were laconic, and clearly the body of information is not vast, but Mr. Cunninghame Graham has made the very most of it. The best story is that of the black horse which fell ill, and was left by Cortes in charge of an Indian chief. The Indians, of course, knew nothing about horses, but they housed this one in a temple, and 'thinking he was a rational animal' offered him with great ceremony 'fruits, chickens, and all the chiefest delicacies they could find'. The horse died. One wonders it did not occur to Cortes to tell them what to feed him on, but perhaps he thought it too obvious to mention. The Indians in alarm buried the horse, and carved a stone image of him which they set up in the temple. More than a hundred years later a company of Spaniards, reaching this spot, found the image worshipped as the god of thunder and lightning. There are other tales, not so good as that one, but good enough. There is also an account of the way the Conquerors rode, and a description of the horses now to be found in South America, and, incidentally, a good deal of repetition here and there. The author has certainly squeezed his orange dry. The manner is distinguished but supercilious, and the whole book, even to the notes, is full of pinprick affectations.



*The Dawn (Being the History of the Birth and Consolidation of the Republic of Chile)*, by Agustin Edwards, G.B.E., LL.D. (Ernest Benn. 28s.) Don Agustin Edwards has followed up two earlier volumes on his native country with a history of its fortunes from 1810 to 1841. The book is enormously indebted to the monumental *Historia Jeneral de Chile*, published in Spanish in the eighties of last century by Diego Barros Arana. One could wish that Don Agustin had viewed his subject in a new way, for instance, that he had examined the interesting theory recently advanced by Mr. Cecil Jane in his *Liberty and Despotism in Spanish America*, that the South American revolutions were a protest against the so-called enlightened and liberal colonial policy of the Bourbon kings of Spain, rather than against metropolitan checks on autonomy. This theory at least explains the fact that the American colonies suffered the tie with Spain to subsist for three centuries for no reason except that they did not care to sever it. Don Agustin Edwards's new contribution to the history of his country comes rather in the shape of an attempt to conform to the present fashion in historical writing by romanticizing his leading characters. Portraits in words, such portraits as are best not attempted without a very complete command of the language in which they are written, are scattered through his pages. His narrative should be read in the light of the fact, which he does not emphasize, that the Chilean creoles formed, a hundred years ago, a small, much inter-related class, the great mass of the population being *mestizo* and Indian. The polity of which he describes the dawn was independent of Spain, but it was oligarchic, not democratic; it was a polity in which the small section of the people which was of purely European descent had superseded the Spanish officials

as governors. In truth, Don Agustin relates the history of the first decades of that régime which has ever since obtained in Chile, a régime in which governing power is held alternately by political cliques in Santiago and by dictators.

*The Mysterious Madame: A Life of Madame Blavatsky, by 'Ephesian'. (The Bodley Head. 7s. 6d.)* Mr. Bechhofer Roberts is an unbeliever. On points of doctrine he has not much to say; with feats of magic, however, he is in his element. He pursues Madame Blavatsky rapidly through her career, explaining away every supernatural occurrence as he overtakes it, or, with transparent cunning, holding back the explanation for a page or two, only to spring it in haste for fear the incident should, though ever so briefly, have impressed anyone. His subject is certainly good value: a kind of burlesque epic, the fabulous element supplied by those mysterious Masters of Wisdom who took so warm and personal an interest in the heroine's fortunes. When, for example, she had, under the temporary influence of black magic, given her hand bigamously to an Armenian merchant, they were concerned to find that his business was not flourishing. 'He has no money,' wrote the Master Serapis, 'and his brains are weak. Will my brother *try* to find him a partner? . . . He will readily give you notes for any amount to be payable at future days provided you find him a partner with gold and silver.' The italics are particularly heart-rending. It must have been difficult for Serapis to treat a theme like this with due sublimity. He was more elevated on the young Bostonian editor, Gerry Brown. 'Our younger brother is shy and secretive. . . . His nature is sensitive and not unlike the Thibet Lotus—

it shrinks and withdraws from the hand which tries to force open its tender petals.' Getting down to bed-rock, he continued: 'Advise thy youngest brother of the city of Boston to try and increase his paper to sixteen pages'. The book is crammed with this admirable fooling; but though Mr. Bechhofer Roberts has admittedly a *tendre* for the stout and shady female Odysseus in her non-psychic aspect, he fights the battle of scepticism with more heat and even spite than becomes one flogging a horse so patently defunct—for dead the Mahatmic correspondence is unquestionably, or at least 'all dead of it that here can die'. Pretensions like Madame Blavatsky's are in a sense beyond the reach of logic: their soundness can only be made to appear more or less improbable, and perhaps that is what her latest biographer finds so exasperating. His narrative is overcrowded; one would have enjoyed more, but failing that a great many minor points should have been courageously abandoned.

*Nicholas II: The Last of the Tsars, by Princess Catherine Radziwill. (Cassell. 12s. 6d.)* 'This is not,' says the author in a foreword, 'a political study of the reign of Nicholas II . . . . This is simply a human study of an unfortunate sovereign, showing the man himself as revealed in his diaries and letters to his wife. They speak for themselves.' At first sight the most remarkable thing about the diary is that it should ever have been kept. 'The weather is lovely. . . . I rode my bicycle in the garden. . . . Uncle Vladimir and Uncle Paul had dinner with us, and then we all looked through old fashion papers. . . . Before going to bed I took a refreshing bath.' These are the capital events of the Tsar's life, from which he rarely deviates to politics, and never to anything else. The

young man's ineptitude is pathetic, his self-complacency is almost staggering, his imagination null. Still, there seems not much harm in him. Circumstances altered that, placing millions of people at the disposal of a Tsar who had no interest beyond his own family, and who received all disasters not immediately affecting it with the equanimity of a completely vacant mind. His diary of the war years has not been published; but the letters he wrote to his wife from headquarters, after he had assumed command of the army, are almost farcical in their serene helplessness. 'Bless the troops,' she had urged him, 'by your precious being, show them for whom they are fighting!' He showed them accordingly. 'The army discovered that its leader was a small, inoffensive-looking, but most cruelly disposed man, who did not care whether his subjects lived or died.' He continued to note down the weather with unflagging interest. He drove about the neighbouring country by the aid of a map. 'Mistakes often occur, as the maps are obsolete, having been made eighteen years ago.' This struck the Commander-in-Chief as a good joke. After losses more immense than usual, he did vary his favourite topics with a few ideas on the campaign. 'The military situation would improve if the Germans ceased to press us at the same point for several days. . . . If there should be no fighting for a month, our position would be far better.' Comment is needless. Princess Catherine Radziwill comments, however, to satiety, underlining every point.

*Kostia the Cossack*, by P. N. Krassnoff. (Allen & Unwin. 12s. 6d.) The scene of this novel is Russia in the seventeenth century; Kostia, the hero, is a Russian nobleman's son. Many years before, his father had set out on an

embassy to Persia; neither the ambassador, nor his wife, nor their baby daughter had been seen again. Kostia, at the age of eighteen, ran away from his aunt's house in Moscow, promising to return and claim his betrothed after six years. He joined the Cossacks; found his lost sister living among them as a Cossack girl; took part in the conquest of Azov; learned, in the moment of victory, that his sister had been abducted during the absence of the Cossack bands; and vowed that he would, if necessary, search the world for her. Years passed in the search; at length, prophetically guided by the Grand Lama, he discovered her in Amu, the widow of the aged Khan, and rescued her from the funeral pyre on which she was to be burned with her husband. Having restored her to her Cossack lover, he began to think of his own bride, and returned to claim her according to promise; but she was in the very act of taking monastic vows.

The novel is both straightforward and picturesque, with some dramatic and some charming scenes; but its simplicity makes it on the whole, perhaps, a little tedious.

*The Memoirs of Garibaldi; edited by Alexandre Dumas; translated with an Introduction by R. S. Garnett. (Benn. 21s.)* The title of this book is rather misleading: Garibaldi's *Memoirs* occupy less than half of it. Part II is all Dumas; Part I is the work of half a dozen different hands; a speech by Victor Hugo and an essay by George Sand are generously, if mistakenly, thrown in. It is a book about, rather than by the Liberator; and perhaps the genuine enthusiast will read it all.

The *Memoirs*, of course, are astonishing; Garibaldi's life, even more than his character, seems too good to be true. His narrative contains no suggestion of a hero born

out of due time: it is the record of a hero in a heroic world. Adventures sprang up before his feet; Italy and America, the prairie, the ocean, the besieged city, all were transformed by his presence into the theatre of glory; Homeric scenes and struggles invited him from every side. His wife was an Amazon; his universe was thronged with pirates, knights-errant, tamers of horses. Not only was he himself chivalrous, gentle, compassionate, careless of danger, careless of hardship, merciful, open-handed, a lion in battle, a lamb in peace; but so, if we are to believe him, was almost everyone he met—the defenders of Rome, the conquerors of Sicily, the forgotten exiles of South America, dying for the freedom of a country not their own. On these last Garibaldi particularly dwells, he alone remembered them; he will break off anywhere to record their virtues and to bewail their loss. It was a sacred duty, not to them only, but to Italy, for whom he held their memory, as it were, in trust, and any failure to discharge it was a burden on his mind. He was shipwrecked, during his American exile, off the coast of Santa Catharina; after describing the wreck, he thus continues:

Those who perished in this disaster numbered sixteen. Amongst the fourteen survivors . . . I sought one Italian face, one Italian figure, but there was not one! All the six Italians who had accompanied me were dead: Carniglia, Mutru, Staderini, Navone, Giovanni . . . I cannot remember the name of the sixth.

I ask my country's pardon for having forgotten the name.

Garibaldi was fond of hearing that he was a poet; and certainly the merit of these *Memoirs*, as literature, is on



their poetic side. He had no gift for consecutive narration, no eye for character, no interest in—hardly any contact with—the prose of life. But his subject could dispense with them.

Part II is an account of the campaign in Lombardy, and of the Sicilian Expedition. Dumas' historical narrative, on the whole, 'wants shade'; it would be the better now and then for 'a long chapter of sense'—that is, of politics not strictly Garibaldian: beside Mr. G. M. Trevelyan it is almost dull. But the causeries and other oddments scattered here and there about the book are lively, ultra-romantic, and preposterously Dumasesque.

A hand rather ardent than expert is responsible for the translation, nor, I suspect, can all the frequent mistakes in proper names be visited on the printer's head.

*Mr. Line*, by A. L. Pavey. (*Peter Davies*. 7s. 6d.) This is, in its way, a perfect book: it is 'of a piece', a grey roll of 'homespun', authentic but drab.

It tells the story of the submergence of a junior civil servant into the mediocrity of routine; but it is very clever, for all through the book the hero's ideal alternative is shown to us, and we see that it would have been as worthless and exasperating as the life he has to lead.

Thus the book is not so depressing as one might have expected, for, if we can see that the little men have little lives and little dreams, we may yet suppose what we will of the lives of those whose dreams are grander.

*The Intelligence of Animals: Studies in Comparative Psychology*, by Frances Pitt. (*George Allen & Unwin*. 15s.) Miss Pitt has written a rather bulky little book for the people who *feel*, rather vaguely, that cats and cows and voles and

even trout are really rather dear creatures. Well, perhaps they are.

It is unfortunate that the book should have appeared with this kind of title.

*Simpson*, by Edward Sackville-West. (Heinemann. 7s. 6d.) This is a simpler story than *Mandrake Over the Water-Carrier*, about simpler people, in a simpler setting; that is, perhaps, why this book is wholly successful. To read it is to acquire a greater breadth of sympathies.

So exquisite, so tidy, and so sincere a study of purposive gentleness demands, of course, a very special symbolization. Mr. Sackville-West has reduced all this dignity, restraint, and charity to the portrait of a children's nurse.

Indeed, that is all that there is to the outside of this charming book, the life story of a nurse, not quite a *nanny*, a little too straight and rapier-like to be a *nanny*, but not, of course, a *spinster*. Ruth Simpson resented being called Miss Simpson. Is it not Nurse's prerogative to be Mrs. Simpson, when she is not the best of all, plain Simpson?

There are little mistakes in the book: the nursery maid would not have had charge of the younger child with bronchitis while the far more experienced nurse looked after the elder, healthy child, and there *are* other cures than poll-shaving for lice in the hair; but these mistakes matter hardly at all.

There is also much exquisite writing and, everywhere, restraint; but the book is worth while for something more than this, for its general wisdom and for the tolerance it breeds. Nor is it, for all its gentleness, anywhere a dull book.

It is as exciting as the lives of many children and the

love in their wide eyes, and as restful as the brows of mothers who watch their sleep.

*Men Dislike Women: A Romance*, by Michael Arlen. (Heinemann. 7s. 6d.) I find it difficult to read a book by Mr. Michael Arlen rather than to read 'Michael Arlen'. The critics have accustomed us recently to 'Arlenism' as a type, as a significance, as a symbol.

We read that 'Arlenism' is vulgar or is gentlemanly, is modern or *vieux jeu*.

But 'Arlenism' is all stuff and nonsense. Mr. Arlen is a moralist who fears above all else, it seems to me, that if he were taken seriously it would be by the wrong people, and who accordingly prefers to be taken lightly by the right people.

This book is about New York, perhaps . . . about the reactions of two New York sets and the reactions of Mr. Arlen to 'culture'.

It is full of brilliant things. It is quite unsatisfying, of course. It is, in his own words in another connection, 'the scum of the world sitting on the top of the world', and, again, in his own even subtler words, it is 'very pretty with the prettiness of a piece of nonsense'.

Mr. Arlen can write prose, and yet prefers to give his readers the impression that he would be embarrassed that they should think so.

He tells us that American husbands 'put up with as much from their wives as we at home do from our mistresses'. That may be true, but it suggests, after all, a very dull civilization.

Perhaps American readers will put up with as much from Mr. Arlen as we at home do from Mr. Aldous Huxley.



# LIFE AND LETTERS

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W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

ARNOLD BENNETT



I first knew Arnold Bennett in 1904 when we were both living in Paris. I had taken a very small flat near the Lion de Belfort, on the fifth floor, from which I had a spacious view of the cemetery of Montparnasse; I used to lunch in, and dine at the *Chat Blanc* in the rue d'Odessa. A number of painters, sculptors and writers were in the habit of dining there, and we had a little room to ourselves. We got a very good dinner, *vin compris*, for two francs fifty, and it was usual to give four sous to Marie, the good-humoured and sharp-tongued maid who waited on us. We were of all nationalities, and the conversation was carried on indifferently in English and French. Sometimes a painter would bring his mistress and her mother, whom he introduced politely to the company as *ma belle-mère*, but for the most part we were men only. We discussed every subject under the sun, generally with heat, and by the time we came to coffee (with which I seem to remember a *fine* was thrown in) and lit our cigars, *demi-londrès* at three sous apiece, the air was heady. We differed with extreme acrimony. Arnold used to come there once a week. He reminded me years later that the first time we met, which was at this restaurant, I was white with

passion. The conversation was upon the merits of Herédia. I asserted that there was no sense in him, and a painter who was there scornfully replied that you didn't want sense in poetry. From this an argument arose upon the objects and limitations of poetry which soon embroiled the whole company. I exercised such powers as I had of sarcasm, invective and vituperation, and my antagonist, a taciturn Irishman, than whom there is no man more difficult to cope with, was coldly and bitingly virulent. The entire table took up the dispute, and I have still a dim recollection of Arnold, smiling a little, calm and a trifle Olympian, putting in now and then a brief, dogmatic, but, I am certain, judicious remark. He was older than most of us. He was then a thin man, with dark hair very smoothly done in a fashion that suggested the private soldier of the day. He was much more neatly dressed than the rest of us and more conventionally. He looked like a managing clerk in a city office. At that time the only book he had written that we knew of was *The Grand Babylon Hotel*, and our attitude towards him was somewhat patronizing. We were very highbrow. Some of us had read the book and enjoyed it, which was enough for us to decide that there was nothing in it, but the rest shrugged their shoulders, though with good nature, and declined to waste their time over such trash. Had you read *Bubu de Montparnasse*? That was the stuff to give the troops.

Arnold lived in Montmartre, I think in the rue des Dames, and he had a small dark apartment filled with Empire furniture. He was exceedingly proud of it. It was very tidy. Everything was in its place. It was not very comfortable, and you could not imagine anyone making himself at home in it. It gave you the impression of a man

who saw himself in a certain rôle, which he was playing carefully, but into the skin of which he had not quite got. As everyone knows, Arnold had then given up the editing of a magazine called *Woman*, and had settled in Paris to train himself for the profession of literature. He was reading Stendhal and Flaubert, but chiefly Balzac, and I think he told me that in a year he had read through the whole of the *Comédie Humaine*. He was just beginning on the Russians, and talked with enthusiasm of *Anna Karenina*. He thought it, at that time, the greatest novel ever written. I am under the impression that he did not discover Tchekov till much later. When he did he began to admire Tolstoy less. Like everyone else who lives in Paris, he had come across a particular little restaurant where you could get a better meal for less money than anywhere else. This one was on the first floor, somewhere in Montmartre, and now and then I used to go over to dine, Dutch Treat, with him. After dinner we went back to his apartment and he would play Beethoven on a cottage piano. Arnold's plan of campaign was cut and dried. He proposed to make his annual income by writing novels, and by writing plays to make provision for his old age. Because I had lately had my first play produced he gave me one of his to read. I criticised it with vigour. He had made up his mind to write two or three books to get his hand in, and then write a masterpiece. I listened to him, but attached no importance to what he said. I did not think him capable of writing anything of consequence. When I asked him what sort of book his masterpiece was going to be, he said, something on the lines of *A Great Man*; but this, he added, had brought him in nothing at all, and he couldn't afford to go on in that style till he was properly established.



Arnold was good company, and I always enjoyed spending an evening with him, but I did not much like him. He was very cocksure and bumptious, and he was rather common. I do not say this of him depreciatingly, but as I might say of someone else that he was short or fat. I left Paris, and it was many years before I saw much of him again.

The Stage Society produced a play of his which I liked. I wrote and told him so, and he wrote a letter to me, thanking me, in which he laid out the critics who had not thought so well of the play as I did. He wrote one or two books which I did not read. At last I came across *The Old Wives' Tale*. I was astounded to discover that it was a great book. I was thrilled. I was enchanted. I was deeply impressed. I had never suspected that Arnold was capable of writing anything of the sort. It would be impertinent of me to say anything in praise of it. I have read many appreciations of it, and I think everything has been said but one thing, and that is that it is eminently readable. I should not mention a merit that is so obvious except that many great books do not possess it. It is the greatest gift of the story-teller, and one that Arnold Bennett had even in his slightest and most trivial pieces. I thought at first that he owed it to his journalistic training, but since the other writer of our day in whom I find this characteristic most marked is Marcel Proust, it is clear that this is not the reason; and now I am under the impression that it is due to the intense interest the author has in what he is writing at the moment. Even when Proust is at his dullest he is so absorbed in his subject that you cannot help but read on, eager to know what is coming next; and with Arnold (to my mind), in the same way, though you felt sometimes that what you were reading was rather

childish, you were constrained to turn over one page after the other till you reached the end. The success of *The Old Wives' Tale* came slowly. I think I am right in saying that it was reviewed favourably, but not with frantic eulogies, and that its circulation was moderate. For a time it looked as though it would have no more than a *succès d'estime* and be forgotten, as all but one novel out of a thousand are forgotten. By a happy chance, which would take too long to narrate, *The Old Wives' Tale* was brought to the attention of Mr. George Doran, who had bought sheets of it; he forthwith acquired the American rights, set it up and launched it on its triumphal course. It was not till after its great success in America that it was taken over by another publisher in England and attracted the attention of the British public. For many years, what with one thing and another, I do not think I met Arnold, or if I did it was only at a party, literary or otherwise, at which I had the opportunity to say no more than a few words to him; but after the war, and until his death, I saw much of him. Much has been written of him during these later years, and I have little to add. He was become a great figure. He was very different from the thin, rather insignificant man, looking like a city clerk, with his black hair plastered down on his head, that I had known in Paris. He had grown stout. His hair, very grey, was worn much longer and he had cultivated the amusing cock's comb that the caricaturists made famous. He had always been neat in his dress, disconcertingly even, but now he was grand. He wore frilled shirts in the evening and took an immense pride in his white waistcoats. He has related the story of a picnic I took him on while he was staying with me in the South of France when, a storm preventing us from leaving the island on which we were, he took

stock with his humorous detachment of the reactions of the various persons present to the slight danger we found ourselves faced with. He did not say that the women were all in pyjamas and the men in tennis shirts, duck trousers and *espadrilles*; but that he, refusing to permit himself such *sans gêne*, was arrayed in a check suit of a sort of mustard colour, wore fancy socks and fancy shoes, a starched collar, a striped shirt and a foulard tie; and that when at six next morning we all got home, bedraggled, unshaven, and looking like nothing on earth, he, in his smart shirt and neat suit, looked as he had looked eighteen hours before, as though he had just come out of a band-box. To the end of the experience he remained dignified, self-possessed, good-tempered and interested.

But it was not only in appearance that he was a very different man from the one that I had known in Paris. I dare say it was all there then, and perhaps it was only my stupidity and youth that prevented me from seeing it. Perhaps, also, it was that life had changed him. I think it possible that at first he was hampered by his extreme diffidence, and his bumptiousness was a protection he assumed to his own timidity, and that success had given him confidence. It had certainly mellowed him. He had acquired a very sensible assurance of his own merit. He told me once that there were only two novels written during the last thirty years that he was confident would survive, and one of these was *The Old Wives' Tale*. It was impossible to know him without liking him. He was a character. His very oddities were endearing. Indeed, it was to them that the great affection in which he was universally held was partly due, for people laughed at foibles in him which they were conscious of not possessing themselves, and thus mitigated the oppression which

admiration for his talent must otherwise have made them feel. He was never what in England is technically known as a gentleman, but he was not vulgar any more than the traffic surging up Ludgate Hill is vulgar. His common sense was matchless. He was devoid of envy. He was generous. He was courageous. He always said with perfect frankness what he thought, and because it never struck him that he could offend he never did; but if, with his quick sensitiveness, he imagined that he had hurt somebody's feelings, he did everything in reason to salve the wound. His kindness glowed like a halo about a saint.

I was surprised to see how patronizing, on the whole, were the obituary notices written at his death. A certain amount of fun was made of his obsession with grandeur and luxury, and the pleasure he took in *trains de luxe* and first-class hotels. He never quite grew accustomed to the appurtenances of wealth. Once he said to me, 'if you've ever really been poor you remain poor at heart all your life. I've often walked,' he added, 'when I could very well afford to take a taxi because I simply couldn't bring myself to waste the shilling it would cost'. He admired and disapproved of extravagance.

The criticism to which he devoted much time during his later years came in for a good deal of adverse comment. He loved his position on the *Evening Standard*. He liked the power it gave him and enjoyed the interest his articles aroused. The immediate response, like the applause an actor receives after an effective scene, gratified his appetite for actuality. It gave him the illusion, peculiarly pleasant to the author whose avocation necessarily entails a sense of apartness, that he was in the midst of things. He read as a man of letters, and whatever

he thought, he said without fear or favour. He had no patience with the precious, the affected, or the pompous. If he thought little of certain writers who are now more praised than read, it is not certain that he thought wrong. He was more interested in life than in art. In criticism he was an amateur. The professional critic is probably somewhat shy of life, for otherwise it is unlikely that he would devote himself to the reading and judging of books rather than to the stress and turmoil of living. He is more at ease with it when the sweat has dried and the acrid odour of humanity has ceased to offend the nostrils. He can be sympathetic enough to the realism of Defoe, and the tumultuous vitality of Balzac, but when it comes to the productions of his own day he feels more comfortable with works in which a deliberately literary attitude has softened the asperities of reality. That is why, I suppose, the praise that was accorded to Arnold Bennett for *The Old Wives' Tale* after his death was cooler than one would have suspected. Some of the critics said that, notwithstanding everything, he had a sense of beauty, and they quoted passages to show his poetic power and his feeling for the mystery of existence. I do not see the point of making out that he had something of what you would like him to have had a great deal more of and ignoring that in which his power and value was. He was neither mystic nor poet. He was interested in material things and in the passions common to all men. He described life, as every writer does, in the terms of his own temperament. He was more concerned with the man in the street than with the exceptional person. Everyone knows that Arnold was afflicted with a very bad stammer: it was painful to watch the struggle he had sometimes to get the words out. It was torture to him. Few realized the exhaustion it caused



him to speak. What to most men was as easy as breathing, to him was a constant strain. It tore his nerves to pieces. Few knew the humiliations it exposed him to, the ridicule it excited in many, the impatience it aroused, the awkwardness of feeling that it made people find him tiresome, and the minor exasperation of thinking of a good, amusing or apt remark and not venturing to say it in case the stammer ruined it. Few knew the distressing sense it gave rise to of a bar to complete contact with other men. It may be that, except for the stammer, which forced him to introspection, Arnold would never have become a writer. But I think it is not the least proof of his strong and sane character that, notwithstanding this impediment, he was able to retain his splendid balance and regard the normal life of man from a normal point of view.

*The Old Wives' Tale* is certainly the best book he wrote. He never lost the desire to write another as good, and because it was written by an effort of will he thought he could repeat it. He tried in *Clayhanger*, and for a time it looked as though he might succeed. I think he failed only because his material fizzled out. After *The Old Wives' Tale* he had not enough left to complete the vast structure he had designed. No writer can get more than a certain amount of ore out of one seam; when he has got that, though it remains, miraculously, as rich as before, it is only others who can profitably work it. He tried again in *Lord Raingo*, and he tried for the last time in *Imperial Palace*. Here, I think, the subject was at fault. Because it profoundly interested him he thought it was of universal interest. He gathered his data systematically, but they were jotted down in notebooks, and not (as were those of *The Old Wives' Tale*) garnered unconsciously and stored in his bones, in his nerves, and in his heart. During his later



years he wrote nothing better than *Riceyman Steps*. Here the attempt was less ambitious and the achievement complete. But that Arnold should have spent the last of his energy and determination in the description of a hotel seems to me to have a symbolical significance. For I feel that he was never quite at home in the world. It was to him, perhaps, a sumptuous hotel, with marble bathrooms and a marvellous cuisine, in which he was a transient guest. For all his assurance and his knowing air, I felt that he was, here among men, impressed, delighted, but a little afraid of doing the wrong thing and never entirely at his ease. Just as his little apartment in the rue de Dames years before had suggested to me a rôle played carefully, but from the outside, I feel that to him life itself was a rôle that he played conscientiously, and with ability, but into the skin of which he never quite got.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *This little piece was written as an introduction to The Old Wives' Tale in an Omnibus Book, about to be published by Messrs. Doubleday, Doran & Co., and does not pretend to be an examination of Arnold Bennett's work and talent.*

TRANSLATED BY MAURICE BARING  
FROM  
PUSHKIN

Bound for your far-off native shore  
From alien lands you went away;  
I shall remember evermore  
The tears I shed upon that day.  
My hands grew colder as they tried  
To keep you from forsaking me;  
'End not', my soul to Heaven cried,  
'The parting's dreadful agony.'

But you whose lips with mine were blent  
In bitterness, your lips tore free;  
From lands of sullen banishment  
To other lands you summoned me.  
You said to me: 'When we shall meet,  
Where skies of azure never end,  
Within the olives' dark retreat,  
That kiss shall come to life, my friend.'

But there, alas! where azure gleam  
Irradiates the vaulted skies,  
Beneath the cliff where waters dream,  
You fell asleep no more to rise.  
Your beauty in the grave's abyss,  
Has vanished, and your misery—  
Gone is the resurrection kiss. . . .  
I wait for it: you swore it me!

COL. C. B. THACKERAY, D.S.O.

## AN INDIAN SUMMER

## PEN AND INK SKETCH

Three-quarters of a century have passed since the last shots were fired in the great Indian Mutiny. It is strange to think that there are old men and women living, British and Indians, who, as boys and girls, saw the tragic drama enacted before their eyes—even took some part in it themselves. But of those Englishmen who were in the thick of it throughout, Colonel Sir Edward Thackeray, of the Royal Engineers, was the last. He belonged to a bygone social and soldierly order, whose code, no longer understood, has left a vanishing tradition of un-self-seeking and unquestioning devotion to duty, which it is well to bear in mind in these more critically self-conscious days. In looking back on the last three decades of Edward Thackeray's long life of ninety years, one may perhaps recapture something of that spirit. It is these last years that form the subject of this sketch.

A few words will serve to outline his career. His grandfather, the first William Makepeace, son of an Etonian Head Master of Harrow, of a Yorkshire family, was in the service of John Company under Warren Hastings. Six of his seven sons died in the same service, two of them killed in action. The seventh, the Rev. Francis Thackeray, historian and antiquary, was Edward's father. W. M. T. was his first cousin.

Born when William IV was on the throne, the young

Bengal Engineer arrived in India just in time to be present at the outbreak of the Mutiny at Meerut, in May 1857. He was at Delhi and Lucknow, winning his V.C. for an act of 'cool intrepidity and characteristic daring' at Delhi, and he served with distinction in the Afghan War. After his retirement, when Chief Commissioner of the St. John Ambulance Association, he carried out a number of far-reaching reforms, and was made a K.C.B. in 1897. From that date, until his death in 1927, he and Lady Thackeray lived in Italy, at Bordighera, which became a British military base during the war. Sir Edward, though over eighty, held a position of active responsibility, as head of the St. John and Red Cross Associations, and received a mention in dispatches. He had the unique distinction of wearing the Great War and Indian Mutiny medals, side by side with the V.C., after a span of sixty years. One other veteran, no other than his old friend, Lord Roberts, won the same decorations, but did not live to wear the last earned.

\* \* \* \*

Edward Thackeray was a man of many resources, both of mind and body, and, when retirement brought leisure, he always had some serious work on hand, such as the writing and illustrating of his reminiscences of war and sport, and other literary pursuits. Chief among his recreations at Bordighera, and, indeed, all his life, were painting, mathematics, and chess. He was ready for a game of chess at any hour of the day or night, and played regularly to the last. He hated losing, and even the most crushing odds would not induce him to acknowledge defeat without checkmate. There was at least one regrettable occasion when he upset the pieces by accident.

It was characteristic of him that he would fight a losing battle to the last pawn, and sometimes snatch a victory at the end. One of his regular opponents was a certain genial eccentric, with whom he had many desperate struggles. After divesting himself of a layer or two of clothing in preparation for the fray, his adversary would open banteringly with: 'Well, Nabob, what's your game to-day—Oriental cunning or the bulldog breed?' He carried his principle of No Surrender into everyday things: it had never been his ill-fortune, he would say, to take part in a surrender or a retreat, and one felt that to him Surrender was an unthinkable thing.

His rules of living were simple: occupation, regularity, and moderation in all things. He kept up the same habits to a great extent all his life. He smoked four or five pipes and a cigar or two every day, but cigarettes defeated him—a new-fangled invention, only fit to be thrown away in a severely mangled condition after a puff or two. Never a connoisseur in wines or tobacco, a box of *Henry Clays* (still remembered with a pang of regret) was treated with no more respect than the long, thin black stick, misnamed a *cigarro*, which you cut in two. Abstemious in all things, the Colonel was a firm believer in 'the salutary effect of alcohol in moderate quantities on the system', as he would have put it; and he maintained that the daily tots of grog had saved his life in the torrential rains before Delhi. His appetite was always excellent, and his digestion never gave him a qualm. He was nearing eighty when a stern decree forbade him to continue sea-bathing. His handwriting remained firm to the end, his eyesight keen, and his memory unimpaired. Deafness alone was beginning to cause him some inconvenience.

Like Browning's Venetian, 'Mathematics were his

pastime'. He would turn to a treatise on Quaternions for relaxation. In mathematics, he was fond of saying, you can be sure of Truth. The mechanical sciences appealed to him less. What one might call the 'gadgets' of modern civilization, those useful toys and conveniences that have flooded the last few decades, and made life so much more easy (and so much more rackety)—things that we have come to regard as inescapable when not indispensable, such as geysers and gramophones, thermos flasks and fountain-pens and wireless sets, cinemas, even motor-cars—for him they all remained interesting novelties, like flying, in which, to his disappointment, he was not permitted to indulge. He was never at home with a telephone, and his fingers would not accustom themselves to the use of humble objects like hammers and nails and little patent contrivances. He abandoned old methods reluctantly, preferring a corkscrew to a patent stopper, and dismissing keyless or wrist watches with contempt, as meretricious gew-gaws. For years he regarded hammerless guns and safety matches, among other innovations, with grave suspicion. I could never make out whether it was that they were too safe or not safe enough. Most punctilious, punctual and methodical in the management of his private affairs, as in all official matters, he was in some ways curiously unpractical; business, in the City sense, was to him a sealed book.

Endowed with a rare feeling for the beauties of nature, the country round Bordighera was a never-failing delight to him. Excursions up the lovely Italian valleys and to Switzerland or the lakes, with easel and paint-brush, were his chief pleasure. On foot or on his bicycle he made long, preferably solitary, expeditions, and these active



pursuits reconciled him in some measure to the lack of sport. His last bag was a brace of grouse, which he brought down very neatly on a Welsh moor, in his eighty-third year. In his day he had been a keen sportsman, and a hard rider. Painting materials had invariably formed part of the Colonel's kit on his shooting trips in India, sometimes together with a violin or a clarinet, though he was quite ready to admit that his musical performances gave more pleasure to himself than to others. On rare occasions he was even known to burst into some song of his Addiscombe or subaltern days, but, unlike Colonel Newcome, only in the bosom of his family.

It is not uncommon for the old to remember very vividly incidents of their youth and childhood; but he forgot nothing, and could memorize and repeat page after page of modern poetry, when it took his fancy. There comes back to me the recollection of a spring day, when he was near his ninetieth year, of a drive up the Valle Nervia, the mountain tops glittering with snow, and the peach- and almond-trees heavy with their pink and white blossoms. Stretching out his hand towards them, he plunged without hesitation into Ralph Hodgson's *Song of Honour*, the whole of which he knew by heart:

The song of men divinely wise  
Who look and see in starry skies  
Not stars so much as robins' eyes—  
And when these fade away,  
Hear flocks of shining Pleiades  
Among the plums and apple-trees  
Sing in the summer day.

He had a stock of the well-worn familiar quotations of his Marlborough boyhood, and if something set him off,

would break into Harry the Fifth's speech at Agincourt, or Byron's 'Ode to Greece', for the benefit of his grandchildren. Honour, patriotism, and courage, those old-fashioned virtues, were at the very core of his being, and on his lips they had their perfect interpreter.

But he took exception to the last lines of the 'Song of Honour':

I stood upon that silent hill  
Without a wish, without a will  
I stood, I knew not why.

Why without a wish or a will? Even a poet ought not to abandon his will. His creed was Henley's,—master of his fate and captain of his soul,—and he bowed his head to no 'bludgeonings of chance', nor, indeed, to any power except his Maker.

In politics, Sir Edward was a diehard Tory of the old school, and he stuck to the *Morning Post* and *National Review* until they became too uncompromising and vindictive even for him. He remained all his life a staunch Victorian, one of the very last of the Early Victorians, and he must certainly have been the last to keep up the Victorian custom of praying into his top-hat, as a preliminary to his devotions in church. Change of habit irked him, and he was content *stare super antiquas vias*. He spoke in measured terms, with the old pronunciation—*orficers*, for instance, and *fippence* for fivepence—never used an expletive, and barely understood a word of slang. The Victorians were not ashamed to take themselves seriously, but knew how to do it without pomposity or affectation. Their creed was loyalty to a well-tried code that had weathered many storms. Breaches of it meant loss of dignity and self-respect. As Mr. Lytton Strachey says of Queen Victoria, their attitude towards themselves was

*regal*. It was no pose, and in their conduct and beliefs they were above all things true to themselves. So it was with Edward Thackeray. Naturally the change from Victorianism to Georgianism, or whatever the transformation is called, left him at first mildly perplexed. But the toleration that grew with old age helped him to watch, not unsympathetically, the antics of the younger generations. In middle age he had been grave and silent, and a marked reserve and shyness made him appear stern and alarming. After all, thirty years of the East are not conducive to serenity.<sup>1</sup> But the outward crust of the 'sun-dried Anglo-Indian' wears off and mellows with old age. A charming sight it was when the old knight, rising not without difficulty from his chair, would cross the room to talk to some pretty young lady, or a guest whom he had overlooked. 'Grand seigneur par excellence', exclaimed a French woman, to whom the veteran of ninety had paid this courtly little address. 'Comme il a la grande manière d'autre temps.' His fine presence, indeed, everywhere commanded respect and admiration. He was tall and upright, even in old age, and his massive head and strikingly distinguished features marked him not only as a man of action, but a thinker. His natural aloofness did not prevent his making and keeping a host of friends, and some deeply-treasured intimacies.

Himself simple-hearted and unassertive to a degree, he

<sup>1</sup> In 1801 the Duke of Wellington, then Colonel Arthur Wellesley, wrote from India in his caustic style: 'I know but one receipt for good health in this country, and that is to live moderately, to drink little or no wine, to use exercise, to keep the mind employed, and if possible to keep in good humour with the world. The last is the most difficult, for, as you have often observed, there is hardly a good-tempered man in India.' This wise advice still holds, though it does not seem much easier to follow.

never spoke ill of anyone—except a few politicians. He detested gush, and malicious tittle-tattle could not be uttered with impunity in his presence. The old-fashioned sense of discipline, now discredited, was strong in him. The idea of soldiers rushing into print with their strictures and grievances was repugnant to him, and he himself was never known to criticize harshly, even in private, any officer under whom he had served. More than once he had refused to be drawn into newspaper controversies. His words were few, but this only emphasized his contempt for meanness or intrigue of any kind, public or private. It was not so much, as someone said, when engaged with him, not long ago, in an affair requiring very delicate handling, that he was a good officer and an able administrator, but he was a great gentleman. 'Brave!' exclaimed the Duke of Wellington, when some gushing lady was praising our officers. 'Of course they are brave: all Englishmen are brave. But it is the spirit of the gentleman that makes a British officer.' The Iron Duke thought more of the title of gentleman than of all his honours and glory. Sir John Fortescue, his historian, asserts that the type is dying out. 'In these days,' he observes, with crushing severity, 'the meaning of the word gentleman is hardly understood except by those in the decline of life.' The fact is, the young are inclined to be restive under the old code. We must trust that something as 'serviceable', if less gracious, may take its place.

Edward Thackeray's nature was deep-rooted in a natural piety, fortified by the training and traditions of his Victorian upbringing. But his was not merely a conventional religion. Independence and self-reliance were the keynotes of a strong character. After careful consideration

he saw his way clear and straight before him, in the big as in the small things of life, and marched along the road he set himself, unmoved by, and unconscious of, conventional opinions. Like Stonewall Jackson, 'Fearless, strong and self-dependent, he was the very model of a Christian gentleman. . . . Of gentlest courtesy, of invincible courage, and of the purest sincerity, men could not but love and admire him'. There was nothing in him of the military pedant or drill sergeant. 'Whilst campaigning was entirely to his taste,' says Colonel Henderson of Jackson, the quiet mathematical professor, 'life in barracks was the reverse.' The latter was not true of Edward Thackeray, but he was less in his element in orderly rooms and on parade grounds than in the field. He certainly had much in him of the scholarly old Indian generals, Havelock, Outram and their like, who fought none the worse for their learning and Shakespearian quotations. But he was never quick at making or taking opportunities of personal advantage. His qualities might have found him a wider scope in the earlier and less sophisticated India of his forefathers.

In Sir Walter Lawrence's *The India We Served*—an almost all-too-roseate India, as seen through Sir Walter's kindly spectacles—there is a portrait of another Mutiny V.C., Sir Edward Bradford, a school-fellow and old friend of Thackeray's, for which he himself might have stood. It represents a bygone type, now, alas, extinct as Colonel Newcome himself. 'The war-like and aristocratic tribes of India', says Sir Walter, 'recognized that, like themselves, these old soldiers . . . had the grand manners that are born of respect for oneself and for others.' They 'belonged to the school of cavalry officers which flourished in the days of the Mutiny. . . . Their names will always be remembered in India as real



*Bahadurs*. There was a curious resemblance among them: they all were gentle, modest and brave. They never said much about the Mutiny. . . .’ It was commonly remarked that Sir Edward resembled Colonel Newcome. When this came to his ears he was not pleased — ‘an old simpleton,’ he said, ‘to get mixed up with politics and speculation’. However, the likeness to the chivalrous old soldier was certainly there, substituting Thackeray reserve for Newcome gallantry. In the characters of both a great humility was blended with a fearless outspokenness, on occasions, and a singularly charming courtesy at all times. His life-long friend and cousin, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, took him to see the dramatized version of her father’s novel. After the performance she introduced him to the actor manager, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who, I think, took the name-part. The great man rubbed his hands: ‘But, my dear Lady Ritchie, you have brought me the Colonel himself,’ he exclaimed urbanely, in one of his expansive asides. ‘Why *thith ith* Colonel Newcome, in the life.’

\* \* \* \*

There is something specially memorable in the long-drawn evening of a long life. Neither its arrogant prime nor its drab middle age has the same touch of mystery. A certain quality of buoyancy links the two extremes of youth and age, each gallantly fronting a door behind which lies the unknown—for the young this world, for the very old another, yet more mysterious. But not all of the very old retain this indomitable spirit. It was characteristically expressed by Lady Ritchie herself. The last words of her last letter are a joyous challenge to Time: ‘Who says “Youth’s a stuff will not endure”? It lasts as



long as we do, and is older than age.' Sir Edward would have put it less exuberantly. But life, with its serious adventures, still lay before him, too, waiting to be embarked upon, even when death, the greatest of all adventures, inevitably drew very near. For his own part, he found pleasure in life to the very end, for he was never afraid, never willing, but always prepared, to die.

He was nearing eighty before he discarded the trusted bicycle after one or two spills, and drives up the beloved valleys had to take the place of more active expeditions. He was content to sit and drink in the lovely Italian scene. From his windows the coast, unsurpassed in beauty along the whole length of the Riviera, stretched away westwards to the distant Esterelles. By day he basked in the sun on the loggia, and, when evening came, he revelled in the matchless splendour of the sunsets, against the dark outline of the Alpes Maritimes. Ridge after ridge sinks into the changing blues and greens and purples of the Mediterranean. Far along the coast, rows of twinkling lights are reflected in the still waters. Soon, away past Ventimiglia to Mentone and Monaco, every hillside is pin-pricked with sparks, studding the darkness like busy glow-worms. Suddenly a royal planet blazes out overhead above these tiny lamps. One star, and another, and another, joins the friendly company of lesser luminaries. Time and space stood still for the silent watcher on the loggia, looking back on eighty—ninety—years (his cigar adding another glow-worm to the night). What were they now to him but part of the universal music of the *Song of Honour*? He, too, saw earth and sky, carpet and canopy of night, dotted with winking 'robins' eyes'; he heard the 'flocks of shining Pleiades'. It was the perfect Indian summer of his long life.

And so the supremely happy years at Bordighera went on. The last summer of all was spent at Garesio, a resort in the Ligurian Alps, to avoid the fatigue of the usual annual journey to London. The villa overlooked a wide sweep of valley and hills and river, and, not to be idle, he would sit sketching on his balcony. He still enjoyed a picnic, and his game of chess. Although he had at length submitted to a wheel-chair, he preferred to walk without assistance, to the alarm of his friends. Independence was still everything to him. He would make his way almost every day, to the last, to a little bridge over a brook near the garden, where he sat in the sun and exchanged his few words of Italian with an old peasant woman, who never left him empty-handed.

A pavilion by the sea, a memorial put up by English and Italian friends, looks out over the long panorama of the coast he loved so well.



## A FEMINIST DOCUMENT: 1555

In that year Jean de Tournes published at Lyons the works of Louise Labé, securely buttressed from criticism by two documents. The laudatory verses of the men of letters who had enjoyed her favours were printed at the end of the volume, and these sheltered her adequately from adverse literary criticism. But with that tactlessness inherent in the admiration of men for women, they praised her person even more volubly than her poetry, and thus undid in one direction what they had achieved in another. Some buttress against moral criticism was now essential, and this Louise supplied in a prefatory letter addressed to her friend, Clémence de Bourges.

Clémence had two material advantages over the poet. She was young enough to enjoy an absolutely unblemished reputation, and she belonged to a noble family, well known and respected in Lyons. Doubtless Louise hoped that so creditable an association might reflect favourably upon her own character. And, indeed, she needed all the moral support she could get, for her position was doubly difficult. 'Fille, femme, sœur, et tante de cordiers', she was cut off, by talent and inclination, from the class to which she belonged; and she was not accepted by the circle from which she chose her friends. Aristocracy and bourgeoisie alike distrusted her, and the cult of 'louez-moi Louise', started by Marot and ardently maintained by the poets of Lyons, did not help her in the least. So many adverse reasons could be given for such

indiscriminate praise. Even to-day learned ladies have difficulty in believing that Louise, like Ninon de l'Enclos, might have been no less attractive in the *salon* than in her bed-chamber, and that men might take a disinterested pleasure in the music and conversation of the author of the *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, women were admired as much for their intelligence as for their beauty. In 1444 Euryalus, the hero of Piccolomini's *De Duobus Amantibus*, wrote thus to Lucretia:

Who could stop loving just when he has learned the prudence and the wisdom of his mistress? If you wanted to destroy my love, you should not have displayed your erudition. For that is not to put out the fire, but to fan the tiny sparks into a mighty blaze.

A hundred years later Mary Stuart, speaking in Latin before the Court of France, argued that learning was an added charm in women. Certainly Louise's contemporaries believed it, and judged her morals by her erudition, which was considerable. 'The better, the worse.' Her peculiar difficulty was that, even late in the Renaissance, in France and Italy alike, only two classes of women could with impunity absorb and put into practice the spirit of the age: great ladies and courtesans. Louise Labé was not a great lady: the inference is obvious.

Such, then, was the reputation of the *belle cordière* in 1555; and the passionate nature of her poetry was not likely to alter it. In the eyes of nice people (whose ideas, Swift has said, are nasty) an appreciation of love is not incompatible with skill in prostitution. Otherwise more critics would have realized that, without whitewashing one who enjoyed life as well as other women and had

more courage than most, Calvin's *plebeia meretrix* could never have written the Sonnets, or even the *Débat* with its subtle wisdom, and advice to lovers:

La richesse te fera jouir des Dames qui sont avarés:  
mais aymer non. Car cette affection de gaigner ce qui  
est au cœur d'une personne, chasse la vraye et entiere  
Amour: qui ne cherche son proufit, mais celui de la  
personne, qu'il ayme.

La lubricité et ardeur des reins n'a rien de commun,  
ou bien peu, avec Amour.

For many who have praised the qualities of her style but condemned her morals, seem to have forgotten Pascal's verdict, 'Quand on voit le style naturel, on est tout étonné et ravi, car on s'attendait de voir un auteur, et on trouve un homme'.

Indeed, without ever striving after originality, Louise did succeed in imparting her own personal charm to her sonnets. One does not ask of her, as Colletet did of Scève, 'en lisant ses écrits . . . si sa conversation n'était pas plus agréable que ses vers'. Yet she was no innovator: hers was the conventional vocabulary of love, *flammes*, *flèches*, *étincelles*, *astres*, *orages*, *fontaines*. Her lover is the sun that brings her day, the soul without which her body cannot survive, the oak round which she twines like ivy. Even the conceit, as old as Héloïse, of being so wounded with Love's darts that there is no room left for another arrow, reappears in her sonnets. But she triumphs over her material. The sonnets of Louise Labé serve to remind us, as Thérive has said, that 'pendant de longs siècles la sincérité absolue s'accordait fort bien de formes classiques, et ne prétendait pas à toute force être originale'. In her hands the commonplaces of love become convincing; she

breathes her own direct sincerity into the Petrarchan mould. When she sees herself as the nymph of Diana betrayed by Love, she is still Louise, and not just any nymph:

Qu'as tu trouvé, ô compagne, en ta voye  
Qui de ton arc et flesches ait fait proye?  
Je m'animay, respons je, a un passant,  
Et luy getay en vain toutes mes flesches  
Et l'arc apres: mais luy les ramassant  
Et les tirant me fit cent et cent bresches.

The naive irritation of 'et l'arc après' is entirely individual. So, too, in the second sonnet, a thoroughly conventional category of the weapons and tribulations of love (a sonnet which Magny imitated and spoilt), her accent is unmistakable in the sudden contempt of 'Tant de flambeaus pour ardre une femelle'. While the third, a masterpiece in the art of Petrarchizing, is also exquisite and sincere:

O longs desirs, O esperances vaines,  
Tristes soupirs et larmes coutumieres  
A engendrer de moy maintes rivières,  
Dont mes deus yeus sont sources et fontaines:  
O cruautez, ô durtez inhumaines,  
Piteus regars des celestes lumieres:  
Du cœur transi ô passions premieres,  
Estimez vous croître encore mes peines?  
Qu'encor Amour sur moy son arc essaie,  
Que nouveaux feus me gette et nouveaux dars:  
Qu'il se despite, et pis qu'il pourra face:  
Car je suis tant navree en toutes pars,  
Que plus en moy une nouvelle plaie,  
Pour m'empirer ne pourroit trouver place.



Only once she fails, in the eighth sonnet with its elaborately artificial antitheses. Ingenious and elegant, it remains perfectly impersonal. Scève might have written it in one of his less esoteric moments. But not Scève or Magny, or anyone but Louise, could have written the eighteenth: a conventional sonnet on a conventional theme, but a sonnet which tells us more about Louise Labé than all the biographical details culled so eagerly by scholars and research-students from her comparatively uninteresting Elegies:

Baise m'encor, rebaise moy et baise:  
 Donne m'en un de tes plus savoureux,  
 Donne m'en un de tes plus amoureux:  
 Je t'en rendray quatre plus chaus que braise.  
 Las, te pleins tu? ça que ce mal j'apaise,  
 En t'en donnant dix autres doucereus.  
 Ainsi meslans nos baisers tant heureux  
 Jouissons nous l'un de l'autre a notre aise.  
 Lors double vie a chacun en suivra.  
 Chacun en soy et son ami vivra.  
 Permets m'Amour penser quelque folie:  
 Toujours suis mal, vivant discrettement,  
 Et ne me puis donner contentement,  
 Si hors de moy ne fay quelque saillie.

Louise never attempted to maintain her fidelity to an elderly and unimportant husband, not even in her Apology to the 'Dames Lionnoises'.

Mais si en moy rien y ha d'imparfait,  
 Qu'on blame Amour: c'est luy seul qui l'a fait.

What she did maintain was the seriousness and the sincerity of her literary endeavours. When she wrote these

verses, it had been as an honest pastime, for her own recreation. And if now she published them, it was not to advertise the freedom of her morals or the ardour of her nature. Her own wish, so she assures Clémence de Bourges, is to rouse the ambition of her sex, to elevate their thoughts a little above distaff and spindle, and to incite them to new achievements. She asks, in fact, to be read, not as a *grande amoureuse* or common courtesan, but as a woman who, by her own work 'rude et mal bati', would fain turn the eyes of other women to the glory and the pleasure of learning.

And if I have rescued her preface from the comparative obscurity of her volume of prose and verse, it is because I believe that this early feminist, one of the first outside Italy, had a truer idea of the real quality of learning than any of our modern institutions for female education. What Louise stresses is the pleasure to be had from learning, and the honour: an honour which cannot be taken away 'ne par finesse de larron, ne force d'ennemis, ne longueur du tems'. These alone she promises to her sex, and these are enough. But to-day, the advocates of women's education are in the very vanguard of that army whose device is *Knowledge as a Means to Money*. They it is who have swallowed most eagerly the belief that, somehow or other, education is a short cut to all kinds of material and social benefits. The pleasure of study for its own sake, of writing as a way of living over again past joys, 'de récréer la vraie vie, de rajeunir les impressions', as Proust said: that pleasure is forgotten or despised. And yet the pleasure which Louise promised is the only sure benefit that education can bring. For that pleasure depends only on ourselves; 'sera en vous de le

prendre, ou ne l'avoir point: ainsi que ce dont vous  
escrivez vous contentera'.

*To Mademoiselle Clémence de Bourges, Lionnoise.*

Since, Mademoiselle, the time has come when the stern laws of men no longer forbid women to apply themselves to learning and doctrine: it seems to me that those who have the means, should employ this honest liberty which our sex has of old so much desired, in the pursuit of those subjects: and should display to men the injustice which they did us in depriving us of the honour that we could acquire from such studies. And if any woman should go so far as to be able to put her ideas into writing, let her do so with diligence, and not despise glory, but adorn herself with it rather than with chains, and rings, and sumptuous attire: which things cannot truly be accounted ours, except by use. But the honour which learning brings, will be entirely ours: nor can it ever be taken away, by skill of robbers, nor strength of enemies, nor by the passing of time.

Had I been so favoured by Heaven as to possess a spirit great enough to comprehend the things towards which it aspired, I had served, in this place, as an example rather than a warning. But because I passed the greater part of my youth in the study of Music, and found the time left to me all too brief for my rude understanding; and since I cannot myself satisfy the good will that I bear towards our sex, to see it not in beauty alone, but in wisdom and virtue, equal men or surpass them: I can but implore all virtuous Ladies to raise their thoughts a little above their distaffs and their spindles, and to exert themselves to make the world understand that, though we be not born to command, yet should we not be despised as

companions, whether in private or public matters, by those who rule and make themselves obeyed. And besides the reputation our sex will thus enjoy, we shall have done this service to the public, that men will give more application and more pains to virtuous studies, fearing the disgrace of seeing those surpass them, to whom they have ever professed themselves superior, in almost everything.

Wherefore must we incite each other to so praiseworthy an enterprise: from which you must not turn away or spare your mind, already adorned with many and various graces; nor yet your youth, nor any of fortune's gifts, that you may acquire that honour which letters and learning have ever been wont to bring to those who seek them. And if there be anything desirable after glory and honour, that pleasure which the study of letters has always given, should incite each one of us: which differs from every other recreation. Of them, when we have had enough, we can make no other boast but that we have passed the time. But the recreation of study leaves a contentment of its own, which remains longer with us. For the past gives us more satisfaction, and is more useful than the present: but the pleasures of sentiment are lost forthwith and never return, and sometimes their memory is as painful as the acts themselves were delightful. Besides all other pleasures are of such a nature that, whatever memory we retain of them, yet can it not put us again in the mood that then we were in: and however vivid the imagination imprinted in our minds, yet we know well that it is but a shadow of the past which abuses and deceives us. But when it so happens that we put our thoughts into words, however much thereafter our brain may run through an infinity of matters and travel incessantly, yet is it true that, long afterwards taking up our writings, we

return to the same point and the same mood as we were in before. And so we redouble our contentment, finding again that past pleasure which we took either in the matter we wrote of, or in the understanding of the subjects with which we were then occupied. Also the judgement passed by our later conceptions upon our earlier, gives a singular satisfaction.

Both of these benefits which proceed from writing should urge you to it, being assured that the former cannot but accompany anything you write, as it does all your other actions and your way of life. While the latter will be yours to enjoy or not, according as that of which you write pleases you or not. For my part, when first I wrote these youthful works, as later when I saw them again, I looked for nothing but an honest pastime and means of avoiding idleness: and I had no intention that any but I should ever see them. But since that some of my friends have managed to read them without my knowlege, and since (as we believe readily those who praise us) they have persuaded me that I ought to bring them to the light, I have not dared deny them; yet menacing them the while that I shall make them drink half of the discredit that may accrue.

And because women do not willingly show themselves alone in public, I have chosen you to be my guide, dedicating to you this little work, which I send to you with no other intention than to assure you of the good will which for a long time I have borne you, and to urge and make you wish, seeing this my work so rude and ill-constructed, to bring into the light another which will be more polished and more comely. God keep you in good health. From Lyons, this 23rd July, 1555. Your humble friend. Louïze Labé.



JANKO LAVRIN

## RAINER MARIA RILKE

## I

It is enough to compare Rilke's poetry with the work of such representatives of German modernism as Detlev von Liliencron, Richard Dehmel, Stefan George, or even his Austrian colleague, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in order to notice at once that essentially 'feminine' quality of his which makes his very strength (similar to Chopin's strength in music) grow out of his weakness. All his sensitiveness, his emotional and spiritual exaltation, seem to have developed largely at the expense of his will and his vitality. Besides, as the last scion of an old aristocratic stock, he was bound to inherit from his ancestors, not only their refinement, but also their physical exhaustion, as well as a certain inadaptability to the 'practical' modern life. Being too much in the past by his blood, and too much in the future by his mind, he could not help feeling—like the 'Last ones' of his early sketches—entirely out of place in the present-day world. Hence his inability to 'settle down' and his restlessness of a romantic *déraciné*—features with which he combined a melancholy shyness, an incurable fear of life, and a rather Slavonic passivity.

Rilke is, in fact, curiously Slavonic, not only by his nature and by the extreme melodiousness of his poems, but also by his instinctive leanings, his 'selective affinities'. Born (1875) and bred in Prague, he was greatly attached to that city. He also professed, in his two youthful 'Prague Stories' (*Zwei Prager Geschichten*), his sympathy



with the Czechs and their language. One of his early poems is an enthusiastic tribute to the famous Czech poet, Jaroslav Vrchlicky. He seems to have been familiar also with the work of the 'pre-Raphaelite' eclectic, Julius Zeyer, with whom he shares his contemplative dreaminess, his broad cosmopolitanism, as well as his roaming propensities. Whether he knew or ever heard about the work of Otokar Brezina (his Czech peer and one of the greatest mystics in modern poetry) is a matter of conjecture. Infinitely more important for his inner growth was, however, his subsequent contact with another Slav country: with Russia.

Rilke himself acknowledged that his stay in Russia (1899 and 1900), where he enjoyed, amongst other things, also the personal acquaintance of Tolstoy, had been the most decisive event in his life. His matchless *Stunden-Buch* (The Book of Hours) was inspired mainly by the atmosphere of the 'holy Russia' of yore. So was his less convincing and somewhat voluble prose work, *Die Geschichten vom lieben Gott* (Stories of the Good God). There existed, of course, in those days, quite a number of Russias—including that of the vilest bounders on earth. Rilke was, however, fortunate enough to discover, at the very outset, the one which appealed to him, which responded to his own need and nature.

It was the religious and the childlike strain in the people he had come across in Russia that made a particular impression upon the young poet. And this was to be expected, since both features happened to be typical of his own character as well: he was supremely religious, and at the same time remained in essence a child, an eternal child, to the end of his days. Or to state a complicated thought in rather too simple terms: he grew up and

matured mainly *on the plane* of a child. Hence his almost unconscious depth, and his peculiar insight into the secrets of life and man—an insight so full of spontaneous wisdom and so utterly devoid of 'cleverness'. With all that he possessed an artistic sensibility which made him one of the greatest craftsmen in modern European poetry. Yet the poet grew in him only together with the man, and vice versa. This is why his work shows, apart from a steady technical progress, also the steady inner progress of an individual who is striving—through art—for his highest self-realization, and who finds in this very strife his main creative stimulus. The word poetry meant to him neither technical juggling nor emotional debauch, but that crystallized inner experience in which the 'idea', rhythm, and melody become one organic whole. It was the heat of that experience that welded, in his case, the 'content' and the 'form' in such a magic way as to make him imbue even the ordinary worn-out expressions with an entirely new *souffle* and flavour.

## II

Rilke's first poems, *Leben und Lieder* (Life and Songs, 1894) can be left aside as too derivative, too Heinesque at times, and sentimental. Even in his subsequent three collections, *Larenopfer* (Offerings to Lares, 1896), *Traumgekrönt* (The Crown of Dreams, 1897) and *Advent* (1898), one feels strongly his indebtedness to the general trend of the nineties. Subjective and impressionist as they are, they still show more rhythmic and verbal suppleness, more fineness of touch than actual originality. But whereas the *Larenopfer* deals almost exclusively with his native soil and city, he turns in *Traumgekrönt* and in the *Advent* within himself only, and sings like a shy stranger in this world:

Ich will wie ein Kind im Krankenzimmer  
einsam, mit heimlichem Lächeln, leise,  
leise—Tage und Träume bauen.<sup>1</sup>

Abandoning himself to dusk and loneliness, to his moody reveries, emotions and impressions, he found for them an adequate poetic rendering even when they seemed to disintegrate into their most elusive shades and nuances. Yet, however much preoccupied with his own inner world, he still preserved a longing for expansion, for a warm sympathy with people and with things. He knew that cutting himself from them would mean to cut himself from life; at the same time, owing to his romantic uprootedness, he was unable to accept them as they were. Hence the only outlet was a poetic 'transvaluation' of reality—through his own pain and longing. Again and again he returned to the world, in order to re-create it through his vision; to imbue it with a new sense and significance—until the whole of art became for him, step by step, a path towards an actual transfiguration of life. Already in the *Advent* he sings:

Das ist mein Streit:  
Sehnsuchtgeweiht  
durch alle Tage schweifen.  
Dann, stark und breit,  
mid tausend Wurzelstreifen  
tief in das Leben greifen—  
und durch das Leid  
weit aus dem Leben reifen,  
weit aus der Zeit.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Like a child in the sick-room, lonely, with a secret smile, will I softly, softly—build my days and my dreams.

<sup>2</sup> That is my strife: consecrated by longing, to roam through all days.

It was in his next two books, *Mir zur Feier* (To my Glory,<sup>1</sup> 1899) and in *Das Buch der Bilder* (The Book of Images), that Rilke endeavoured to expand not only beyond reality, but also in it: to weld the real with the supra-real, the temporal with the timeless, in order to make all his daily hours a 'soft dialogue with eternity'. Thus he mixed lyrical and semi-epic themes with philosophic meditations, religious motives, and also with impressionist descriptions, probably stimulated by the influence of the Worpswede group of painters. He lived at that time in the flat land near Worpswede, knew its painters' colony personally, and even wrote a monograph on them (more complimentary than they actually deserved). The broad flatness of the surrounding country became his favourite landscape and a symbol of that psychic expanse, or expansion, of which he sang:

Und dann meine Seele, sei weit, sei weit,  
dass dir das Leben gelinge,  
breite dich wie ein Feierkleid  
über die sinnenden Dinge.<sup>2</sup>

The desire of such an expansion in the world now fostered not only his innate clairvoyance of people and things, but also his vague pantheism, his notion of a primary wholeness of life. Both made him grow out and beyond himself; beyond his former subjectivity. Even his erotics of that period are curiously over-personal and saturated with that *caritas* whose passion has lost all  
Then to reach, strong and broad, with a thousand roots, deep down  
into life—and to ripen, through pain, beyond life and far beyond  
time.

<sup>1</sup> Later on enlarged under the title, *Frühe Gedichte* (Early Poems).

<sup>2</sup> And then, my soul, be spacious and wide, that you might achieve  
your life, spread out like a festive robe over all concrete things.

connection with sensuous love as such. Only Rilke could write such a number of the tenderest poems about girls and women exclusively in that spirit, without ever becoming cheap or false. In fact, his intuitive insight was never more acute than when touching upon the 'eternal feminine'. The rapid growth of both his inner experience and his intense vision is, however, best shown in his *Stunden-Buch* (The Book of Hours), a work the like of which would be difficult to find in modern German poetry.

### III

This collection was written between 1899 and 1903, but it appeared only in 1906, i.e. after his 'Book of Images'. The whole of it was a poetic fruit of Rilke's visit to Russia, undertaken in the company of Frau Lou Andreas-Salome (with whom Nietzsche had been once—so unfortunately—in love). Rilke was, of course, impressed by the 'transcendental' Russia: the Russia of pilgrims, monks, and spiritual seekers. At his very first contact with it, in the atmosphere of the indescribable Easter days in the old Moscow, he felt he had discovered at last what he had been longing for: his 'spiritual home-country'. The passive character of Russian mysticism must have appealed to him as much as the patient and childlike faith of those primitive masses he happened to come across. He lived himself into that atmosphere with a sympathy and an intensity which was bound to produce something unusual when sifted through his artistic temperament. And his *Stunden-Buch* certainly is unusual.

What strikes one above all is its organic blending of art and religion, or at least of art and religiosity. The latter was, in Rilke's case, vaguely pantheistic on the one hand, and curiously childlike on the other. It was his awareness

of that primary totality of all life which is symbolized in God the 'Father' that prompted to him his first attitude. At the same time, his feeling of being a lonely stranger in this world was in itself analogous to that of a child who clings all the more to his parent the more he feels oppressed by his own loneliness. His confident surrender to God was like the surrender of an orphaned child to his cosmic father for whom he had been longing since the beginning of time, as it were, without being able to grasp either Him or himself:

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,  
und kreise jahrtausendelang;  
und weiss noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm,  
oder ein grosser Gesang.<sup>1</sup>

It was partly his 'pantheistic' nearness to God that prevented the poet from getting hold of Him. Again and again God evaded him like a Proteus, or else dissolved in that universal life, which includes all variety, all antitheses and contradictions of existence. Rilke's feeling of oneness with God was thus replaced, time after time, by a passionate quest of God, even by a struggle with God for the sake of his own self-realization; since to grow meant, in his opinion, to become conquered by Him—conquered by higher and higher values (*der tiefbesiegte von immer Grösserem zu sein*). He knew that his own consciousness perfects God Himself, in perfecting itself through God. For God, too, is in the process of becoming. And in so far as He grows through man's consciousness, he is not only man's Creator or Father, but also his creation, his 'Son'.

<sup>1</sup> I circle round God, round the ageless Tower, and I have been circling for thousands of years; and I don't know yet: am I a falcon, a storm, or a great melody.



Du siehst, dass ich ein Sucher bin.  
 Einer, der hinter seinen Händen  
 verborgen geht und wie ein Hirt;  
 einer, der träumt dich zu vollenden  
 und: dass er sich vollenden wird.<sup>1</sup>

At times one wonders whether Rilke is not as much a maker (in the sense of projecting his own *Weltgefühl*) as a seeker of God. And in submitting to Him, he often asserts himself against Him—through his very surrender. On the one hand, he realizes that he and mankind do not live, but are ‘only lived by God’; and on the other, he still challenges Him almost in the manner of that other poet-mystic, Angelus Silesius:

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?  
 Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)  
 Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)  
 Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,  
 Mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.<sup>2</sup>

And again:

Ich aber will dich begreifen,  
 wie dich die Erde begreift;  
 mit meinem Reifen  
 reift  
 dein Reich.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thou seest that I am a seeker. One who walks hidden behind his own hands, and like a shepherd; one who dreams of fulfilling himself through fulfilling Thee.

<sup>2</sup> What wilt Thou do, God, if I perish? I—Thy vessel (if I get broken?) I—Thy drink (if I get spoiled?) I am Thy garment and Thy work, and but for me Thou wouldst lose Thy meaning.

<sup>3</sup> I, however, want to grasp Thee as the Earth does; with my own ripening ripens Thy kingdom.

The ecstasy of religious self-obliteration and that of religious self-realization thus meet in one powerful flame, in which poetry and prayer merge and become one. Aware of the actual presence of God, the poet feels the whole of life as a miracle and mystery. So much so that his own 'earthly little hell' matters little so long as God's will rushes through the Cosmos like a mighty wave in which 'day after day is drowned'.

All these utterances he puts into the mouth of a God-seeking Russian monk. The atmosphere of 'holy Russia' is particularly strong in the second part of the *Stunden-Buch*: 'The Book of Pilgrimage'. Even the occasional landscape motives are reminiscent of the wide and windy plains of Russia. And the poet, who has discovered his inner kinship with the restless 'God-seekers' wandering in those plains, becomes himself a patient pilgrim towards God and eternity. In the third part again, 'The Book of Poverty and Death', he turns against that parody of life which he finds in our great cities, with all their mire and misery. Not only true individual life becomes impossible in them, but even death itself—with all its inscrutable secret—is degraded to a vulgar *cliché*. In his praise of voluntary poverty, which sacrifices the values of the moment to those of eternity, Rilke joins the ideal of St. Francis, to whom the concluding verses are dedicated.

#### IV

Both the poetic and the spiritual pathos are sustained, on the highest level, up to the end of the *Stunden-Buch*, which reflects so remarkably Rilke's own life and strife. It also represents the climax of his inner vision—a climax the very height of which implies a subsequent descent. Rilke's descent in his next two volumes of *Neue Gedichte* (New

Poems, 1907-8) was, however, only apparent. In essence, it was a continuation and a broadening of that path which he had partly struck already in his *Buch der Bilder*. Rilke the visionary and the seer was now joined by Rilke the observer, who wanted to be not only 'beyond' things, but also among them. And once more we notice in him a strong external stimulus. This time it was Rodin, whom he had met already in 1903 and whose secretary he later became.

Rilke found in Rodin a friend and also a complement, as we can gather from his enthusiastic monograph on the *maître*, and even more from his 'New Poems', the second volume of which is actually dedicated to Rodin. For, contrary to Rilke, Rodin was all of this world. It was his rich and robust personality which Rilke admired no less than he did his work. What he now tried to develop to his uttermost was precisely certain qualities he found in Rodin: his patient observation, his sense of plastic form and design—in addition to his own musical and symbolic suggestiveness. Even Rilke's eroticism became more earthly, more passionate. And as to his eye, it soon began to show an almost incredible acuteness. Men and women, cities, landscapes, animals, plants and stones—they all were now minutely described from without as a parallel to his intuitive vision from within. His symbolic and his plastic methods thus combined in order to produce a series of poems in which the two visions complete and strengthen each other. Or else he is descriptive and narrative—as in his re-creations of classic, of biblical motives—in order to evoke all the more potently various states of mind. Take his 'Pietà' (dealing with Magdalene's love of Christ), or his 'Garden of Olives'—a condensed symbol of man's utter loneliness on earth.

Rilke's former intoxication with God is absent in the

*Neue Gedichte*. His concreteness often looks as if he were trying to balance by it his excessive spiritual *élan*. Yet in his subsequent *Requiem* (1909) and his 'pre-Raphaelite' *Marienleben* (Life of the Holy Virgin, 1912) the old Rilke reappeared. So did he in his most important prose work, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (The Papers of M. L. B., 1909).

This book is, perhaps, the best introduction into the mind of Rilke, the man and the poet. As a disguised inner autobiography, it is an interesting prose *pendant* to his entire poetry before *Neue Gedichte*. His impressionism (somewhat reminiscent of J. P. Jakobsen's *Niels Lyhne*), his lyrical, psychological and narrative power, join here in order to reveal the mentality of an aristocratic *déraciné*, who is haunted by his over-sensitive nerves, his poverty, by the squalid misery of the old Parisian quarters, and most of all by his own fear of life. The 'papers' thus become an ingenuous mosaic of rambling moods and impressions, meditations, portraits, reminiscences of childhood—sprinkled now and then with supra-normal experiences. The concluding pages, with his strange version of the fable about the Prodigal Son, are especially interesting, in so far as they give a clue to Rilke's own attitude towards love in general. It is quite possible that he wrote the book in order to sublimate his 'romantic' fear of life—by analysing it away. A definite success in this respect we find, however, only in his later, post-war, books: *Sonette an Orpheus* (Sonnets to Orpheus, 1922) and *Duineser Elegien* (Duino Elegies, 1923).

## V

Both collections were published after a ten years' silence on the part of Rilke—including the years during

which Europe had to pass through the greatest self-inflicted trials. Yet the poet emerged out of that chaos unimpaired and in many respects even riper, as we can gather from the two mentioned books, which belong, most decidedly, to 'difficult' poetry. They are difficult owing not only to Rilke's technique, but also to his condensed and often too abstract symbolism, reminding one, now and then, of Paul Valéry who happened to be—together with André Gide (the Gide of *Les Nourritures terrestres*)—amongst Rilke's favourite French authors. His restless quest of God, on the one hand, and his instinctive fear of reality on the other, seem to have given way to a more or less serene acceptance of life, which he now affirms even through his cult of death. For, instead of reducing life to death, he regards death as a new revelation and a new metamorphosis of life itself. Contemplating all existence *sub specie aeterni*, he sees in it a flux of continuous metamorphoses: a flux from the real to the supra-real, from the visible to the 'invisible'—up to that final transformation of things which will obliterate eventually the hostility between spirit and matter. Death as a path towards such a metamorphosis thus becomes—in his opinion—the greatest event and at the same time the greatest mystery on earth. Really dead is only that mechanical existence which rejects its own change and stops. Or as Rilke puts it elsewhere: 'Death is when a man lives and does not know he lives; death is when he cannot die at all'. Hence:

Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flamme begeistert,  
 drin sich ein Ding dir entzieht, das mit  
 Verwandlungen prunket.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Crave for the change! O, be inspired for that flame into which vanish all things that glitter with change.

The meaning of life consists in a transfiguration through such a flame. The final end of the material world even is to become 'invisible', i.e. transfigured on the highest plane of man's consciousness. And for the sake of such an aim we must accept, we must love our earth and our life with all the reverence of which we are capable.

Erde, ist es nicht dies, was du willst: unsichtbar  
in uns erstehn?—Ist es dein Traum nicht,  
einmal unsichtbar zu sein? Erde! Unsichtbar!  
Was, wenn Verwandlung nicht, ist dein  
drängender Auftrag?  
Erde, du liebe, ich will.<sup>1</sup>

It was at this stage that Rilke's thought, too, became more 'Sybillic' (to use the expression Edmond Jaloux applies to him) than ever before. And more than ever he tried—whether rightly or wrongly—to transcend art through art itself: to make art a path towards the highest peaks of consciousness and life.<sup>2</sup> Always avoiding publicity and self-advertisement, he spent the last years of his life in great seclusion. Yet, however much he may have neglected fame, fame did not neglect him. At the time of his death (in December 1926) he was known, and deservedly so, all over Europe as one of the best and profoundest modern poets.

<sup>1</sup> Earth, is it not this that thou wilt: to be re-born in us invisible?—Is it not thy dream to become some time invisible? Earth! Invisible! What, if not change can be thy pressing task? Earth, thou my beloved one, I desire thee.

<sup>2</sup> The two slender collections of poems he wrote in French, at that very period, able though they are, are somewhat reminiscent of his early German work.



JOSEPH BRADDOCK

THE  
MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES

This polished, knobbed, and glass-doored cabinet  
Derelict in the box-room stands here yet,  
Amid much lumber, photographs and books;  
A Python's skin or two attached to hooks  
In the flowered and sloping attic-wall; a bat;  
The case of birds' eggs I am looking at;  
And pictures, boxes, stacked up carelessly:  
Yet drawers bide safe behind the well-turned key.

See now, I open! Each drawer gradually  
Reveals its lovely contents and its prize,  
These treasured rows of keen-won butterflies,  
Flashing such vistas back on childhood's years  
The swift illumination's near to tears.

First there's the Swallow-tail, an aërial flower  
Spanning one chestnut grove, hour after hour,  
Lazily floating, skimming, rising, falling,  
And now a foreign mountain-slope recalling;  
The garden Whites; the sulphur-coloured rover;  
A flight of Clouded Yellows passing over,  
Tarrying, breeding on the Cornish clover;  
Frail, flitting by on orange-tippèd wing  
Past hedgerow greenness of an English spring;  
My boyhood's friend, as certain harbinger  
As cuckoo ever was of summer near.

Then I see purple buddleia in bloom,  
 Fat fragrant spears pointing amid the zoom  
 Of loaded bees and iridescent flies  
 To clear receding depths of August skies,  
 Harboursing scarlet bands and peacock eyes;  
 The nursemaid's common 'soldier butterfly';  
 And Painted Lady's fashionable dye.

Not till earth's flowers grew came butterflies,  
 The moths and bees, to probe their nectaries.

Once more a burnished metal chrysalis  
 Has burst its chitin: I would yield for this  
 Many an hour of more ambitious bliss  
 Watching the fresh imago dry, close by,  
 A Greenish Silver-washed Fritillary,  
 Radiant with new-found bloom, on a thistle head  
 Fanning her wings, framed in the forest glade.  
 It seems I go with bag of tarletan,  
 Talk to the woodman, hunting where I can.



But what is this? The tall oaks' monarch dim—  
 A sheen of Tyrian by the puddle's rim—  
 Planed down to drink, who sometimes leaves the air  
 To suck putrescence as did Baudelaire!  
 Nor in this world of emperors and their court  
 Forget I subjects of a lesser sort:  
 The commoners, affording daily sport,  
 The Browns and little Blues, the Speckled Wood;  
 Hairstreak, Small Copper, each in its abode;  
 And hosts of others I shall not collate,  
 Some of them humble, some of queenly state.

Not till earth's flowers came fell butterflies  
A damascened floescence from the skies.

And now the light departs. With starlight shed  
Mildly along the ride, 'tis time to spread  
The treacle-trap upon the roughest trees,  
Of sugar, rum and syrup, and the lees  
Of hops compounded, so the moths may drink  
That soon to drunken lethargy will sink.  
Then light the shuttered lantern; make the round;  
Pill-box the many prizes to be found,  
Those bumping moths that nod with fiery eye,  
Wings still, aloft, or dithering frenziedly.

Again the egg of Poplar Hawk is mine,  
My adolescence' pearl, glued 'neath the shine  
Of fluttering leaves: the tiny shells confine  
The midget larvæ which, by moulting, turn  
To huge green caterpillars with spiky horn  
Twisting their angry heads, disturbed, in scorn.  
Of Puss Moth caterpillar's frightening mask,  
The head drawn back, whips raised in weird burlesque.  
And Woolly Bears; the silkworm's soft cocoon;  
And fakir 'sticks' resembling twigs alone.

Here on the sandhills gold the ragwort blows:  
And colonies ringed yellow, black, expose  
On every plant bad-tasting warning colour,  
The larvæ of the pretty Cinnabar,  
A flyer weak at evening. Dashes past  
A male Oak Egger on voluptuous quest,  
Answering mysterious calls borne on the weather  
From nubile female torpid in the heather.

This surely is Nature's subtlest wireless chain,  
Each moth a little owl-faced aeroplane!

How shall I name them all? How best recall  
Those hours of pure delight? Am I to scrawl  
Across my page in love and reverence  
A further catalogue? On suburb fence  
Shadowed, to lee, one rich Autumnal morning,  
Grey triangles, the stout Red Underwing  
Which flies revealing arcs of black and red;  
Piratical, prodigious the Death's Head;  
Ubiquitous the Buff-tip caterpillar;  
The dainty Plume; the cockney Vapourer;  
Lappet and Kentish Glory; garden Tiger;  
Magpie, and ghostly Leopard at a light.  
Enough. They pass, these denizens of night.

The drawers return. The key is turned once more.  
And now embalmed within this written score,  
Sky flowers past which my childhood's footsteps trod;  
In time before the years and mites corrode  
These fays of sun and moon. O flowers of God,  
O floating flowers, whose scales beyond all art  
Are patterned tapestries! Whose world's apart  
From compromise, mechanic excellence,  
Soaring with flight's full range of eloquence.

MICHAEL JOYCE

## THE ROMAN FOOL

I believe that a story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end: and by the word 'end' I mean something more than the mere cessation of narrative. I have sometimes wondered whether my belief in form is responsible for the shapely movement of my own affairs. The mildly eventful course of my life appears to me in retrospect as a series of well-defined episodes, each of which, set down on paper, just as it stands in my memory, would be seen to possess the strict form of a story. I wonder whether my beliefs have impelled me to behave in the manner most likely to produce these patterns, or whether my memory creates them after the event. Every man's memory, of course, exercises more or less the artistic power of selection: is my life then, really as dull as my neighbour's, and is my mental autobiography only more exciting than his because I possess this selective power to a higher degree?

The story which I am prefacing at such length can only be told as an experience of my own for this reason: the chief interest of the story for me, and therefore, if I am successful, for the reader, lies in the effect which the man's face produced on me when I first saw him, in the pit of a theatre; or, to be more precise, in the cause of that effect. If I were a Shakespeare, I might be able to produce a similar effect upon the reader by a bare narration of the facts; but, since I am not a Shakespeare, and since the impression of tragedy which I received from his face was at least as strong as any I have received from reading or seeing *King Lear*, I am bound to tell the story as it happened.

Now comes the question: was it, as it happened, a story at all? If the jury's 'death by misadventure' was the right verdict, the end, that is to say the man's death, was unconnected with the beginning and the middle, and the tale would be a mere slice of life, interesting, but not, from my point of view, worth putting into print. But if, as I believe, his death was due to deliberate suicide, *felo-de-se*, then the whole thing falls into shape. On the other hand I may be wrong; as far as I know, the jury's verdict was consistent with the evidence, and it may be just the storyteller's instinct, a kind of literary sentimentalism, which has convinced me that he did at last, during the night following our conversation, take the step that for years he had felt necessary to his self-respect; and that his attempting to guard against such a conviction on my part was to take the proud course of doing what was for him a heroic act without the support of an audience.

Some years ago I was sitting by myself in the back row of the pit stalls, with a gangway just behind me. Neither the play nor the acting were good enough to hold my complete attention. During the first act I felt as if there were someone I knew behind me, in the front row of the pit. The feeling grew so strong that as soon as the curtain came down and the lights went up I turned round. I was wrong; there was no one there whom I had ever seen before, but there was a man with an unusually fine head sitting directly behind me, evidently bored. He sat in a listless way, his legs in a slanting position which suggested weakness, his hands lying slack on his knees, and his head hanging down towards his chest as if it were too heavy for his neck. It was a splendid head, heavily covered with dark hair already shot with grey, although he could not



have been more than thirty-five. It was not until he lifted his head with that characteristic weariness that I saw his face. It was the wreck of the most beautiful face I had ever seen, beautiful, but not effeminate. The wide brow, stamped with a spacious intellect, was balanced by the harmony of the other features, but the way the face was tapered down to the chin hinted a lack of stamina.

Then I caught his eyes. They looked straight through mine, unseeing, with something of the glassiness that is the effect of certain drugs. But that was nothing: it was the weariness of the eyes themselves, and even of their sockets, that appalled me; the weariness of a man sick of seeing horrors who sees them none the less; the sickness of a soul that has viewed the promised land of happiness, to be thrust back into the wilderness of frustration and disappointment; the grief of a God who sits among the ruins of the world he has created—it was all this that held me; and the sight of such despair entrenched in so beautiful a place, such sad contempt in the curve of the lips, and such still misery in the slackness of the limbs, spoke to me of suffering greater than I could understand, which made my interest seem frivolous and even cruel.

Suddenly consciousness dawned in his eyes, and, seeing me, he winced. I threw my gaze past him, looking for the friend who was not there, but I knew that he was not deceived. I straightened my neck and sat square in my seat, hoping that the ineptitudes of the Magazine-Programme would deflect my attention from the impulse to look round again. I could feel his sight focused on my back, carrying a stream of dislike across the gangway. I beckoned impatiently to the attendant and bought a copy of the play, which I neither wanted nor could afford. Soon after the lights went out for the second Act I had a

sense of relief; turning round hurriedly I saw that he had gone. I hoped, and perhaps rather feared, that he had left the theatre, but a quick glance ten minutes later showed him to me in the dim light of the Exit, sitting back in his seat, his head drooping towards his right shoulder, and his gaze fixed on the floor beside his feet. After that I could not follow the play.

At the end of the second Act I went straight into the bar without looking round. As I was drinking my glass of beer he came in. His gait had the weakness which his legs had suggested. He walked up to the bar with his air of crippled nobility, like a plucked archangel, and in a low voice ordered a double whisky, which he drank neat at one gulp. Even his way of drinking was unusual. When the ordinary man tosses off a neat double Scotch he looks, if not positively cheerful, at least as if he thought it had done him good: few men show no emotion at all when they drink. But he drank with what I can only call complete passivity. As he put the glass down he turned and caught my eye again, and again he winced, this time with distinct resentment. Then, changing his expression and setting his head back on his shoulders with an air of decision, he took out his cigarette case and beckoned me with a backward nod. I took the two paces which separated us. 'Match?' he said, offering me a cigarette as I produced my Swan Vestas. We both lit up.

'Coming out?' he said. 'I think we've seen enough.' I agreed awkwardly.

'Better come along to my place,' he said, as we left the theatre, 'it's not far from here.' He turned northwards off Shaftesbury Avenue, walked a few hundred yards up one of the more respectable streets of Soho, turned

sharply to the left, and entered a house of decayed Georgian gentility. I followed him up the stairs, which were narrow and ruinous. His living room, on the second floor, was squalid and depressing. Some rooms are cheerful in their untidiness, suggesting a bustling vigour in their owners which makes them impatient of detail: this room's disorder was only desolate. There were several hundred books huddled on their shelves or strewn about: Plato in the original, some of the English poets, and one or two novels; but they were mostly scientific works, many of them in German.

He lighted the gas-fire. 'Get yourself a seat,' he said, 'while I find a couple of glasses.' After some search he produced two odd tumblers, a bottle of whisky, and a syphon. 'Say when,' he said, sitting down to pour out the drinks. We drank in silence. Then, putting down his glass, he looked me up and down with contempt and said: 'I suppose you are what might be called a spiritual rubberneck.'

I explained, with great embarrassment, that I was an author in a modest way; and, while apologizing for my rudeness, suggested that a highly specialized interest redeemed my curious glances from the crime of vulgarity. There was all the difference in the world, I said, between the loutish stare of a bowler-hatted philistine at a beautiful woman and the trained, appreciative glance of a painter. Not, I went on, that I was so much of an artist after all, but still—in short I talked rather wildly to hide my discomfort.

'And what did you find in my face to appeal to your trained appreciation?' he asked unpleasantly. One cannot tell a man whose whisky one has been drinking for the first and probably the last time that he has a tragic face;

I could only answer vaguely that I had found him interesting.

He lit a cigarette before speaking. 'I am, in fact,' he said, 'an interesting case: not, unfortunately, to myself.' He paused: I took the opportunity to rise, thank him for his hospitality, and declare that I must be going.

'Why,' he said, 'it's early yet.' I protested that I had pressing work on hand, some reviews which were already overdue. He pointed out that but for his suggestion I should still have been in the theatre; so I sat down again. He settled himself in his chair in his own peculiar attitude, his legs side by side, not crossed or sprawling, with a box of cigarettes to hand.

'I admit,' he said, 'that your curiosity is not quite so vulgar as the next man's. I rarely leave my rooms because I dislike being stared at. I don't think I flatter myself when I say that I attract attention; and, of course, up to a point, I like it. Any man with consciousness beyond that of a clod likes to feel—Rousseau had the courage to put it into print—that he is unique, and that his character is therefore of great interest to the rest of humanity; and since every rational man must at the same time know that this is probably not the case, there must be an element of pleasure in his annoyance at being stared at, so long as he is certain of being properly dressed. But unfortunately irritation is more durable than pleasure; and besides, in my case there always seems to be an element of pity in the stare, which even I have enough pride to resent.'

He stopped short and threw a shrewd glance at me. Then he smiled and went on in a tone of insufferable contempt: 'And now I suppose you think that I am going to tell you the story of my life, which has remained locked in my breast for so many years. That I, recognizing

your unusual perception, and softened by your sympathy—not pity, of course, but the manly sympathy which respects its object—that I have chosen you to share the burden of my wretchedness.’ I would have interrupted, but he silenced me with a gesture and went on: ‘And, true to your age and your type, you believe passionately in the virtues of confession; you pride yourself on the possession of that nameless something which makes you the recipient of so many tragic confidences; and as a budding novelist, combining business with pleasure, you enter in your mental notebooks particulars of all cases which, with what literary powers you command, you may one day convert into hard-earned guineas.’

I was infuriated by the deliberate, rhetorical way he mouthed the kind of half-truths that are so upsetting. I rose, no doubt very red and ridiculous, and said: ‘Did you bring me here to be damned rude to me?’

‘No,’ he said coolly, motioning me back into my chair. ‘When I asked you to come back with me I had no idea of being rude. But I suppose that since I was going to talk to you about myself I wanted to be quite sure you had no illusions about my motives. Or possibly I had been entertaining some such rubbish myself.’

His tone had assumed a pleasantness that charmed away my anger, and I found him more human after his outburst.

‘I wonder whether my name would mean anything to you,’ he said, and told me what it was. As it happened, it meant a good deal to me, at second-hand. I knew a man who had been at Cambridge with him, long before my time, of course, and had heard something of his extraordinary talents. I had gathered that he was a physicist and a mathematician, and something more besides. He

had the philosophic mind, the co-ordinating mind, the mind that takes the laborious discovery of others as the crude material to be shaped and squared and built into monuments of plastic thought. His was the mind for which the age was waiting, said my friend. The problems of modern physics, he went on, were so abstruse that, though they had engaged the best minds of our time, there was a danger that science would be bogged in a metaphysical morass which could only be compared with the theology of the medieval schoolmen. Science was crying for a great creative mind, gifted with Aristotle's power of organization, Plato's sense of intellectual beauty, and Shakespeare's human intuition: a mind that could do for Science on the grand scale what Rivers had done on a small scale for anthropology. And here was a man who had promised to be all this and to do all this, and who, with that lack of stamina which has been before the defect of such a mind, had let the death of his wife—this with fine scorn from my scientific friend—distract his mind and break his magnificent ambition.

And this was my host. I told him that I had heard something of his work. 'My work!' he said. 'The work I was going to do. . . . Don't, for God's sake, tell me that there's time yet and that I'm still young. Someone else will have to do my work.'

'I had gathered,' I said, 'that it was not the sort of work that anyone could do.'

'Anyone!' he said. 'Do you know anything at all about physics?'

'Not what you would call anything.'

'Have you ever read metaphysics?'

'No.'

'I wonder,' he said, 'whether you could grasp this.'



He gave me what was no doubt a concise and lucid exposition of the structure of the atom, but his phraseology was far beyond me.

'It's no good,' I said, as he paused. 'I'm quite hopeless at that kind of thing. You'll never make me understand it.'

For the first time since I had seen him he lost some of his weariness. 'By God, I will,' he said, stubbing his cigarette. 'Listen to this. . . .'

I cannot do justice to what followed in the next two hours. I know so little of his subject that I cannot hope to set down accurately what few fragments I remember; and the very nature of his talk made it impossible to reproduce. He started, so much I am sure of, with the Athanasian Creed, which, he said, contained the universe in a nutshell. He applied the dogma of the indivisible trinity to the individual, to the sexes, to mankind, and to nature. I began to find myself being caught up into the progress of his argument. I began to join in with a word here, an illustration there; while he, expanding and explaining my own comments, dragged me further and further into the ordered swirl of his ideas. He nursed my mind, eased my understanding over the stony ground, tempted me with the beauty of a passing metaphor, urged me forward with a blast of logic, and at last, hurling me into the blue heavens of abstract thought, he taught me how to fly. He needed no wings himself: his intellectual stature was so great that he could stand squarely on the earth while his shoulders topped the clouds; and so his furthest-flung conclusions came round the full circle to end in common-sense.

As he talked he gained the animation that made him seem an archangel, not plucked, but in full flight. Finally,

he left argument behind him and burst into a rhapsody which may have lasted half an hour. I have no idea what he said; I do not even know what he was talking about; but I cannot imagine a greater intellectual experience. I can only describe the last half-hour's talk as a symphony. The themes were stated, re-stated, and modulated; there was a slow movement of sombre musing; a scherzo in which his wit played between the great design of the universe and the poor, petty mind that strove to understand it; and then, as he neared the end, the themes were all drawn into the wide sweep of his eloquence, until he launched himself, with all the weight of the universe behind him, onto the flood tide of his majestic peroration.

He finished, and relapsed into the listlessness of his peculiar attitude. I said, in a burst of enthusiasm: 'Well, for the first time in my life I can say that I don't mind having missed hearing Coleridge talk.'

He looked up at me with real pleasure. 'I suppose that's as fine a compliment as I've ever had,' he said, and then, smiling bitterly, 'and I suppose that's as conclusively damning as anything you could say.'

'Don't you see,' he went on, catching my surprise, 'the likeness between myself and Coleridge? He wrote a handful of immortal poems, but none the less he was the greatest failure there ever was. The course of his life was strewn with discarded enterprises. He could talk; and what is left of that now? Have you ever read his *Table Talk*, and have you ever been more disappointed? Talk like his is impossible to reproduce: if it were taken down in shorthand and printed it would lose three-quarters of its virtue. And you can take it from me that talk is the refuge of the mind that will not grapple with the greater difficulties of writing. It is the mountebank's art, not the

poet's. Both Coleridge and De Quincey lost their powers of concentration through taking opium: I have lost mine by . . . you can call it what you like.'

He helped himself to another peg of whisky, smiling as he put it down. 'You musn't think that drink is my trouble,' he said. 'I drink a good deal, with very little effect; it's quite incidental with me. No, I suppose you'd call my trouble an ethical problem. If A does this and that, what should B do? I remember years ago hearing a lecture on ethics. It was quite a good lecture. Several questions were asked afterwards, and one of them was this: supposing that A, a man of great value to the community, sees B, an acknowledged wastrel, drowning, and that A has a good chance of saving B's life at the expense of his own, what should A do? The lecturer, I remember, was most annoyed. He snapped out that in the face of death one life was as good as another, and that the question was frivolous. At the time I thought he was right, but now I'm not so sure. I am more inclined to think that his annoyance was due to his not being able to give a direct answer to a question which cut right into the heart of his ethical system. His position, you see, was that of Hamlet in the last scene: having engaged in a friendly bout of rapier-play he had been treacherously pinked with an 'unbated' point. And here have I been tracing the design of the universe: but how much does the music of the spheres help you to meet a simple problem with which you might be faced to-morrow?'

'I don't know so much about that,' I objected. 'These trick problems very rarely occur in real life. It's like Kant's Categorical Imperative: how often do you have the chance of saving a life by telling a lie? And, besides, every problem carries its own solution, in practice.'

'I don't want to be even ruder to you than I have been,' he said, 'but may it not be that you are too young to have met with any great difficulties?'

I was at any rate young enough to resent this. 'No, I don't think it's that,' I said rather stiffly. 'I've been in some pretty awkward positions. But I've always found that when I've been torn between two courses of action the difficulty has really been that I've known perfectly well which I ought to follow, but for some reason or other I've been afraid to. I've seen that sort of thing so often in myself and in other people that I've come to the conclusion that there's no such thing as a problem in real life: there's only fear.'

He sat forward in his chair during my little speech; as I finished he opened his mouth, shut it again, and leaned back in his chair.

'I wonder if you're right,' he said slowly. 'Not that the idea is new to me, of course; but I can see that for yourself it is original. It's obviously a conclusion you've come to on your own account, rightly or wrongly.'

'Rightly or wrongly,' I assented politely; and then with more honesty: 'but I'm damn' well right.'

'Well,' said he. 'Here's my little problem: and when you've heard me through you can see if you stick to your opinion. Where shall I start? When I tell it to myself I start with my childhood, though my early life was quite uninteresting. My parents were intelligent but dull, and although I was their only child they never showed me much affection. When I was twelve I had an attack of infantile paralysis, which affected both legs. The doctors thought I would be a complete cripple, but in the end I reached the state in which you see me now—weak in the legs, but fit for a sedentary life in town. I had been an

active boy, and no doubt the result of my physical weakness was to drive some of the energy out of my legs and into my head. I became studious, and as a lad began to show signs of the powers I have just been demonstrating. While I was at Cambridge these powers began to sprout, I think I might say sensationally. My mother died during my first year, and my father soon after; I imagine that in their dull way they had been necessary to each other. I was left a decent little income in safe investments; and when I came down I settled in London to do some solid study along my own lines. My ambitions were not immediate: with my private income and my complete confidence I felt that I could afford to wait until my mind was fully matured before I began to publish. I only kept up such acquaintances as were useful to me at the moment.

‘I was happy enough for the first year. I had no anxiety about money. I was absorbed in my work, and certain of the most magnificent success in the future. But gradually I began to get stale and restless. I realized with some disgust that, philosopher though I was, I had the human nature of a young man. I found no help at all in dissipation: it became evident that I needed someone to look after me, and, I suppose, to love me. I let my work slide, renewed as many of my old friendships as I decently could, and set about looking for a wife. Now you’re bursting to tell me that one doesn’t find a wife that way—a housekeeper, perhaps, or a concubine—well, even I knew all about that. But what else was I to do? It was that or a matrimonial agency; and I found that, failing work, society passed away the time tolerably well.’

He lit a cigarette and smoked for a few minutes in silence.



'In the end,' he went on, 'I met my wife in a small cinema behind Victoria. God knows what I was doing there, and God knows what moved us to speak to each other. She was a typist; she had no people. It was all very simple. We were married in less than three months. It's queer now to think that one was once happy for weeks and months at a time, actively and positively happy. I can no more remember now what it felt like than I can believe during a cold winter that it's ever going to be warm again. I can't say how or why she made me so happy: we had nothing at all in common, except loving each other. I know that we loved each other as certainly as I know that I was once a squalling brat; but I've no more idea what it felt like. I know that I felt young, for the first time; drunk without wine. My youth came late, like an Indian summer. And all the time I was conscious that my mind would be the greater for my happiness.

'But I don't want to talk to you about my wife. This is what happened. After we'd been married about eighteen months I began to work again. I overdid it in my enthusiasm and had a nasty breakdown. The doctors, of course, prescribed complete rest, including, if possible, a sea voyage. My wife had always longed to see America. This seemed a good opportunity, so we booked our passage to New York on a cargo boat which only carried a few passengers, the advantage being that she would take nearly ten days to get across. Two days out of New York, just after midnight, we were run down in a fog by a French mailboat. She practically cut us in half.

'We were in our berths when the crash came, and by the time we got on deck she was sinking fast and listing horribly. There was no panic. We got into a lifeboat which was just being lowered, but half way down to the



water one of the ropes snapped and the stern dropped, shooting us out into the water. Something must have hit my head as I went down. When I came to I was in the water, with my wife, who was a good swimmer, trying to push a floating spar under my arms. It was a bad moment. I was full of water, and every time I put my weight on the spar it sank under me—and my legs aren't much good for swimming. But in the end I discovered that if I kept it at arm's length the spar would support me easily, and I managed to get the water out of my nose and eyes and have a look round. There was nothing to be seen but fog; my wife had managed to drag me away from the ship while I was stunned, thinking she would sink any minute and take us down with her. We could hear voices in the fog, cries for help, and shouts from the Frenchmen who were trying to pick up our people. We tried between us to move nearer the sounds, and once we could hear the oars in the rowlocks quite plainly. We shouted, someone shouted back; and then the voices got fainter. The water was calm enough until there came the heave of a swell, and we knew that the ship had gone down. Think what it was like. The water was cold; my whole body ached with it. It was dark and there was a thick fog. We could scarcely see each other's faces, and beyond that there was nothing but a little circle of dark water and a wall of fog. We waited; I hung on to the spar while my wife was treading water. There was no sound. Not a voice. Nothing.

'My wife said: "The cold's getting me. I can't keep up much longer." She was gasping as she spoke. I told her to hang on to the spar. It dipped a little to her weight. So long as she could tread water, however weakly, it would

support us both; but I knew that, as a last resort, it could only save one of us.

'I was frightened. I said: "I don't mind if we go together"; and found myself repeating it over and over again.

"You mustn't go," she said desperately. "You've got your work. I'm nothing."

'I said: "Take my hand and we'll go together." She could not well spare the breath, but she said: "No, no. As soon as I'm done I'll let go. You hang on. They'll pick you up. You *must* hang on. Think what you are going to do!"

'I said: "I can't see you drown."

'She said: "You won't see me drown." As she spoke we heard again the splash of oars and the creak of rowlocks. The same thing happened. The sounds came nearer; we shouted; they shouted; and then the sounds began to die away in the fog. My wife found strength in desperation. She said: "We can't let them go this time. I'll swim after them. I'm certain I can find them." In a moment she had disappeared into the fog, swimming strongly. In less than a minute the silence was complete; I could hear nothing of the boat or of her. Then, long after as it seemed, I heard her again, quite close, calling my name. She had not found the boat. An answering hail was in my throat, when suddenly a thought choked it. I saw in a flash what it would mean. She would come back to the spar, my spar, and as soon as she was exhausted—one of us must go, if either of us was to be saved.

'She called my name again, her voice weaker. I could hear her swimming plainly, but still there was nothing but fog all the way round. She had said that I must live for my work; she was willing to die to save my skin; but

would her courage hold in the last cold panic of death? She called again; but I clung to my spar and did not answer. Then I heard her die; I heard her drown within ten yards of me. Then I shouted, but it was too late. The choking screams and the flurry were soon over.

'She need not have died: they picked me up two minutes later. She had said I should not see her die. I did not see her, but I heard; and I've heard her drowning ever since.

'And there,' he said at last, 'is the problem you don't believe in. And, just as you said, there was no problem. There was only fear.'

He helped himself to a drink and lit a cigarette. 'And now,' he went on, 'here I am, still alive. I can't work. I haven't even the incentive of poverty. I have told you the story just as I keep telling it to myself. You see, there is no loophole. And I can't even die.'

'But there is a loophole,' I said. 'If the boats were not able to find you when you shouted, she might not have done.'

He brushed this aside angrily as a quibble. 'Does the murderer,' he asked, 'plead that his victim might have been run over by a bus next day?'

I had no answer to this. 'But I don't see what good it would do if you were to die,' I said feebly.

He looked at me with his old contempt. 'It would give me self-respect,' he said.

'And what's the good of self-respect when you're dead,' I objected. 'I take it you don't believe in an after life?'

'As a person? No. No more did she. Have you ever thought about death? Have you ever thought what it means to be snuffed out like the brief candle that you are, to be forgotten?'

'You would not be forgotten if you wrote that book,' I said. 'Wouldn't that be the best way to pay for your wife's death? After all, that was what she died for.'

'No. She didn't die for that: she died for me. She would not have chosen to die for my work: she never understood it; she may even have resented it. When she spoke of it on the spar it was only to give me an excuse for saving myself like a coward; and I saved myself like a coward. And even the excuse is worthless: I shall never write those books. And I cannot even die. I believe I should be happy if I knew that to-night I should have the courage to kill myself. But, of course, I shan't. Have another drink before you go.'

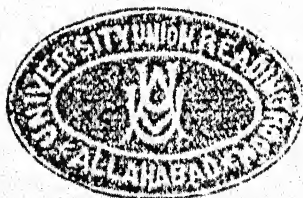
'Just one, thank you.' He poured it out, raising what was left of his own to me as I drank.

'But, of course, you mustn't take me too seriously,' he said, smiling.

"Why should I play the Roman fool, and die  
On mine own sword?"

Good-night. Come and see me again sometime.'

He was found dead in his bed by the woman who cleaned his rooms. The cause of death was an overdose of sleeping draught. The Jury brought in a verdict of Death by Misadventure. There was no apparent motive for suicide. How should they guess at the motives of a Roman fool?



# VICTORIANA

*Victoriana*, by Margaret Barton and Osbert Sitwell. (Duckworth. 12s. 6d.) Mr. Sitwell describes this collection as a Symposium of Victorian wisdom, not absolute wisdom, but 'the particular counterfeits of it which were accepted as genuine in the long days of the Great Queen, yet could have passed for it in no other age'. Some of the compilers' *flosculi* do not seem to satisfy either condition perfectly. For example:

Surely of all the rights of man the right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be, gently or forcibly, held in the true course by him, is the indisputablest. (Carlyle.)

It seems to me that in every function of life and in every combination with his fellow creatures, for whatever purpose, the duties of man are limited only by his powers. (Gladstone.)

Whether these sayings be wisdom or its counterfeit, I am not to inquire. But they are no more Victorian than they are Carolingian. The first is Plato, the second is Burke. It was the *Academy*, I think, that once spoke of 'those beautiful words of George Eliot "The Kingdom of God is within you"' and I live in hope to see 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife' cited as a characteristic effusion of Victorian prudery, addressed by Ruskin to Millais. Under which heading the following passage comes, I really cannot guess:

If the Chinese must be poisoned by opium, I would rather they were poisoned for the benefit of our Indian subjects than for the benefit of any other Exchequer.

To me it tastes like a draught from the perennial fountain of truth.

I have never acquired the scrapbook habit, but I think

I could improve and enliven *Victoriana* with some stray gems of my own finding. Here is one.

One Christian asks another Christian for a drink.

Dear Friend,

I find in wine as in most other things that unless I can get near to the fountain head there is little chance of being able to obtain the best. I am told that Marsala is to be had from Italy direct of a very superior quality. One quarter-cask (about twenty-three gallons) may be sent of the best quality as a sample: pale wine, if to be had, I find generally best. I am sorry to find that a struggle is necessary to obtain anything pure and true in this world but, thanks be to God, we have direct access to the Father through the Son. Let it be good of its sort and wine that will keep in this climate: it is really for stomach's sake more than appetite that we drink it.

The writer was Linnell, the painter; the addressee, Count Guicciardini of Florence, head of the Plymouth Brethren of Italy. As Wilberforce once said, it is very gratifying to know that there are such men in foreign countries.

Or this:

Every eye shall behold Him.

A Sermon preached by the Rev. Hugh MacNeil on the occasion of a visit by H.R.H. Prince Albert to Liverpool.

Or, from an 'Elegy on the Death of a Stranger killed by the concussion of two railway trains' (Charles Ellis, 1840):

It is gratifying to record that the interment was carried out by the Railway Company with all the respect due to the remains of one who belonged, apparently, to the higher ranks of society.

If this last passage be compared with a fragment from the life of Warton with which Mr. Wyndham Lewis has recently gladdened life:

He mixed early with the world, sought and enjoyed the society of the fair sex, and tempered his studious habits with the tender and polite intentions necessary in promiscuous intercourse,



and, on the other hand, with one of Mr. Sitwell's Gladstoniana:

When you cultivate plants that grow from the ground, you cannot help thinking a little who He is that makes that plant to grow,

the nature of the pure and absolute Victorianism is revealed at once. The change of cadence from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century is unmistakable, and we have only to set the plants-that-grow-from-the-ground alongside of the milk-that-is-yielded-untoe-us-by-the-cow to see how it came about. Dickens had so perfect a command of the manner that he could produce Victorianisms serious and satirical without turning an inflexion. Mr. Gladstone's apophthegm on Eggs and Sherry, for instance, is unctuously expanded in *Little Dorrit* and put in the mouth of a Bishop. And will any one undertake to say with confidence whether the following is to be taken in jest or earnest?

We know that we live and breathe: that we have wants, wishes, desires, and appetites. I say, we know that we exist, but there we stop. There, is the end to our knowledge, there, is the summit of our attainments; there, is the termination of our ends.

Shakespeare had the Elizabethan manner similarly at his finger-tips, and, however the pit may have taken it, there can be little doubt that when Polonius delivered his few precepts Pembroke was meant to catch Southampton's eye and both to smile their appreciation to the author in the background:

To thine own self be true,  
And it will follow as the night the day  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Obviously it does not follow at all: but it sounds as if it did, and that is the humour of it.

Every age has its particular way of exchanging ideas: the Elizabethan mode was aphoristic; the early nineteenth century was homiletic. Pulpiteers, as we read in the Brookfield Papers, calculated the moment when the handkerchiefs should come into play, and, as they preached, so everyone, at some time or other, wrote. The eighteenth century talked: the twentieth writes for the weeklies. Mr. Sitwell himself sometimes writes like an Augustan who had strayed into the office of a Sunday newspaper. An old-fashioned cadence, which is not sufficiently remote to be musical, is in itself ludicrous. But it can also be misleading. Leslie Stephen missed the chuckle, which the twentieth century hears quite plainly, in Johnson's dictum:

Henceforth let no man suffer his felicity to depend upon the death of his aunt,

and entered it as an instance of pomposity resulting in absurdity. So, too, Mr. Wyndham Lewis, who certainly cannot allege ignorance as a defence, in compiling the *Stuffed Owl*, included a stanza of Tennyson's *Mechanophilus*:

Dash back that ocean with a pier,  
Strow yonder mountain flat;  
A railway there, a tunnel here,  
Mix me this Zone with that.

not noticing that it was meant as an Horatian patchwork and is in its kind quite good.

The Victorian idiom is dangerous to play with: it is best to go cautiously and wait. Mr. Sitwell has too much wit to suppose that the contrast between the garb and accent of one generation and the next is in itself humorous to a grown-up mind. But he has included passages which I can well imagine being discovered to his confusion

thirty years hence and quoted as fine examples of Victorian good sense, uttered in a manner of which the secret has been unhappily lost. For instance,

The best romance becomes dangerous, if, by its excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called upon to act.

I should have been inclined to leave that where I found it,

Knowing it will be gold another day.

But some of his gleanings are indeed memorable. Dean Wace on the Higher Criticism has a perfect bouquet, and I am not sure whether the best thing in *Victoriana* is the particle *yet* in the following passage, or the picture with which it closes:

He came at last, young, gallant, confident, with a noble bearing and an upright mien, walking with the assured tread of one who knew himself to be *porphyrogenitus*, yet bowing his comely head from side to side gracefully to those who rose up to do him homage. This was the Prince of Wales. It is a wonder that the people did not leap up at him, or cast their garments upon him. . . .

If, as the Dean of St. Paul's has suggested, the universe in one of its aspects is a *risus intellectualis Dei*, surely this image must be part of it. Here the reader seems to be lifted from the phenomenally to the noumenally funny and to catch an echo of that intellectual laughter where-with God eternally laughs at Himself.

May I add that a recent writer in *Life and Letters* was wrong in ascribing the coinage of 'Victorian' to Harris in 1862? Hood, preacher and bookmaker, used the phrase 'Victorian Commonwealth' in *The Age and Its Architects* as early as 1850. The O.E.D. is badly out here.

## READERS' REPORTS

*Lockhart's Literary Criticism: with Introduction and Bibliography*, by M. Clive Hildyard. (Blackwell. 6s.) Miss Hildyard has reconstructed a classic, a minor classic, no doubt, because Lockhart was not a critic of the order of Hazlitt or Lamb. It will hardly be necessary for anyone to follow him beyond the limits of this excellent selection, though if anyone wishes to go farther, the bibliography will guide him to every scrap of Lockhart's critical writing. He comes out well, a man with a keen eye for bad work, and, what one had not realized, a ready eye for good work in a new or unfamiliar manner. In Lockhart we see the effect of Scott's poetry in opening the eyes and ears of the younger generation and preparing the way not only for Byron, but for the reception of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley. Jeffrey never came under the spell: he never escaped from the eighteenth century, and so he went wrong twenty times for Lockhart's once. Lockhart, too, was by far the more disinterested of the pair. He could admire equally the poetry of the atheist Shelley and the prose of the Radical Cobbett—'a weathercock, molten in the days of the giants. With all his faults, he has the intellect and the language of an English classic'. Only in one direction was his sympathy shut up and his judgement blind. He hated Leigh Hunt, Keats took the blows, and in Tennyson he saw another Keats. Yet it is difficult to say that he was altogether wrong. Keats was no doubt strong enough, if he had lived, to work himself free of the Cockney school and its luscious *sensiblerie*, which was all that Lockhart asked of him. Was Tennyson? With far fewer excuses than Keats, he could

be quite as tasteless and still more silly. We cannot say of Tennyson in 1833, as Lockhart, with perfect truth, said of Shelley, that he was 'a gentleman, a scholar, and a poet'. It needed a velvet tap from Coleridge and a slash from the unsheathed claw of Lockhart to make him write 'the language of an English classic': but for them, might he not have been carried downwards by the adulation of a coterie into spasmody, which, to tell the truth, he was always skirting?

Long enough the wine dark wave our weary bark  
did carry.

This is lovelier and sweeter,

Men of Ithaca, this is meeter,

In the hollow rosy vale to tarry,

Like a dreamy Lotus eater, a delirious Lotus eater.

This is not the language of a gentleman or a scholar. And if it stopped a great poet from producing more stuff like that, Lockhart's slating of the 1833 volume can be justified and his deafness to the notes of the real, the coming Tennyson,

And through damp holts, new flushed with may,  
Ring sudden laughters of the jay,

can be half-forgiven.

*The Grass Roof, by Younghill Kang. (Scribner. 10s. 6d. net.)*

This is a very important book. Mr. Younghill Kang is a member of the faculty of Comparative Literature in the University of New York, but he is a Korean, and a Korean scholar of the Chinese ideography, which, of course, involves automatically Chinese philosophy.

The book purports to be, and I accept unhesitatingly

that it, in fact, is an autobiography, describing the childhood of Mr. Kang in Korea, his adolescence in hated Japan at a Government-subsidized school, and finally his flight, thrice prevented and punished with terms of imprisonment, but finally successful, out of the Empire to the United States, with the avowed intention of mastering Western methods and science (I hesitate to say learning, for Mr. Kang allows us so little), for the benefit of his own people in their struggle for self-expression and national consciousness, whether this ultimately be within or without the Empire of the Rising Sun.

The first three-quarters of the book describes the childhood of the hero, this sensitive poet, child of the poets, in a poor but cultured mountain home, beside the stream below the hills, among the pines of Song-Dune-Chi.

There is hardly an intrusion of any foreign element: no strutting Japanese soldiery, no Western mechanization, yet the strength of the book is never greater than in these earlier chapters, in which the quietism of Buddha and the philosophy of Confucius are justified and interpreted.

These early chapters establish, once and for all, how 'worth-while' this culture of Korea is, infinitely older even than the culture of Japan, infinitely prouder and older than any European culture, yet willing to learn whatever may be good from the West, but unwilling to make a blind exchange of one civilization for another without a proper test of the applicability of the new.

The later chapters tell the story of the growth of conscious nationalism, both in the hero and in the country of Korea, the epic of Korea from the Russo-Japanese war until, and even after, the revolution of 1920.

Nor is this story told bitterly, but with restraint and dignity without malice. It is a story which I knew well



when I was living and working first in Japan and then in Korea; and it is a story which I know might so easily have been told venomously by a young Korean.

But *The Grass Roof* rises high above pettiness or hate, and becomes an epic of an age and a culture, and the poet-scholar family of Han will become, perhaps, a group of figures in the national epic literature of the world, as significant as Conchubar and Deirdre, or as Thyl of the Ulenspiegel, a symbol of the right of every cultural group 'to contribute its stone also to the great pyramid of history'.

While the book is all this, and, indeed, because it is all this, it is also a lovely, simple picture of a child's paradise, and a book of maxims for every psychoanalyst to ponder, full of all the kindness of the East to its children and of the gifts of hill and stream and tree and flower to all the children of the world.

*The Colonel's Daughter*, by Richard Aldington. (Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d. net.) It is very difficult, in speaking of a work of art, to define indecency. I do not mean pornography, for which I am content to be guided by the etymology and by the brilliant essay of the late D. H. Lawrence. Nor do I mean indelicacy; indelicacy may be essential to a work of art: it may be necessary to use 'strong colours'. I want to appropriate the word indecency to what is subjective, vicarious, or personal in a piece of writing. When a writer 'gets a kick' out of writing something and allows his kick to obtrude into his writing, he interposes between his readers and his symbolism his own irrelevant emotions; this, because it is inexpedient, is indecent, and is, indeed, a form of exhibitionism, and

it is unimportant whether the exhibitionism be fervent or disdainful, pleasant or unpleasant.

In this sense *The Colonel's Daughter* is an indecent book.

It is a book full of personal hatred, without idealism, without hope, in which no circumstance and no character ever comes to fulfilment and in which event is accidental, wisdom vicariously acquired, and both always stillborn, for they never are permitted to develop into a new life.

All the quality of this brilliant, witty despair is forced out artificially through the author's own contemptuous *néantise*, and each incident of the book seems like a dead child aborted by a callous vivisectionist.

Though the book is packed with clever enough allusions and brilliant cruelties, in which the author seems to delight, I could only discover one flash of spontaneous fun; and I would almost wager that that was unconscious and would, perhaps, be disclaimed with shame by Mr. Aldington, for it is a pun in the first line of page 75; but the very spontaneity of this accident shows up the subjective vanity of the rest.

It is a brilliant, cruel, destructive book, quite unworthy of the author of *Death of a Hero*. It is a pity, of course, that one of the large booksellers should have refused to handle it, for I suppose that this will vastly intrigue the wrong public, who will then, I think, probably be disappointed, and that will do no good to anyone, but it would be equally a pity that Mr. Aldington should not come to realize that every public expects of him something better than the contempt and negation of this last piece of his work.

*The Travel Tales of Mr. Joseph Forkens, by Lord Dunsany.*  
(Putnam. 7s. 6d. net.) It is always a treat to have a new

book by Lord Dunsany, particularly for nice minded people. I use the word 'nice' in its purist's sense, but, of course, it is equally valid in every other sense.

It is the nicety of the language which conveys so pleasantly the illusion of fantasy which is so much more significant than the burden of reality. And that is the 'burden' of this charming book of 'tall' stories. They set out to show that it is much better to believe a thing than to prove it, though, of course, you must never believe a thing you do not like. Well, it's the only way to have the world as you want it, and certainly the only way to have the literature you like.

And what delightful stuff this is, these reminiscences of Mr. Jorkens 'at the club'; and when he stops talking you must utter 'some other of the remarks that may be likened to little dead twigs that one throws down to keep a fire going' and he'll be off again, carrying the illusion of elf-land into daily life, making old names magic and magically making new ones.

When I had finished reading this book, I turned back to page 139, and then, finding my cue, I read aloud:

'There are no aunts here.'

'Dick was no fool. . . . A fool would have argued that there must be aunts everywhere. But he understood, and his eyes lightened, like the sea when a shadow passes.'

And that, I explained to my astonished host, is what will happen to you if you read this book.

*The House Improved, by Randal Philips. (Country Life Ltd. 7s. 6d. net.)* Those who wander, constantly or occasionally, through the back streets of English cities, or London suburbs, sometimes sigh at the wilderness of Victorian

brick. It is Mr. Philips's theme that many of these elderly houses, lacking in convenience and repellent in looks, can be acceptably transformed, in both respects, at little cost. Certainly the prospectus of his book, which provides two photographs showing the reformation of No. 9 Rectory Grove, promises an exciting alternative to the house-breaker's drill; but his pages, though they contain many other interesting photographs, leave a suspicion that the remedy may prove a variant form of the disease it tries to cure. Are those terraces which Mr. Philips is anxious to beautify with fanlights and divided panes really so uninteresting as he finds them; or is it that he has not eyes to see that charm which possessors of the Camden Town mind (Mr. Barnett Freedman, for instance) show us in their work? He has a distinguished predecessor in error. In 1893, introducing a series of Arts and Crafts Essays, William Morris lamented that 'persons of taste find themselves regretting the brown brick box with its feeble and trumpery attempts at ornament, which characterises the style of building current at the end of the last and beginning of this century'. Before Morris, Palladian enthusiasts plastered over Dutch bond brick. They were wrong; Morris was wrong; perhaps Mr. Philips is wrong too, and will destroy, in his renovating ardour, something which, given time, would acquire a beauty he, too, would see.

Less can be said against interior remodellings. Yet even here there is a danger of needless alteration. On page 21 Mr. Philips shows 'a commonplace Victorian mantelpiece' which he suggests should be encased with dummy wooden pilasters, and fitted with barless grate and sheet-iron surround. But why substitute the meaningless for the commonplace? If replacements are to be made, the modern fireplace shown in Figure 14 is a better

model than the mock-Georgian. When our Georgian ancestors themselves brought seventeenth-century farm-houses up to date, they did it in the style of their own time, not in that of the Tudors; and if our own time has no style, it is better to leave bad alone.

It is not without relevance to mention that *The House Improved* is almost a specimen piece of what, in its physical aspects, a book ought not to be.

*The Perfect Hostess*, by Rose Henniker Heaton. (Methuen & Co. Ltd. 7s. 6d.) Those who enjoy entertaining others will themselves find entertainment in the pages of this index to hospitality; those who do not will, it is to be hoped, gain instruction—and courage. Mrs. Henniker Heaton has accumulated quips and recipes to make a housewife's holiday; and those who desire information as to the sort of meal a husband wants to give his men friends in his wife's absence, or are undecided whether or not to use amber glasses when 'the Professor comes to dine', or aspire to make omelettes, or wish to find amusement for several sub-lieutenants, cannot do better than consult this admirable *vade-mecum*. There is a list of things to be packed in a man's suitcase when he goes away for the week-end, a list of comforts for the guest-room, and a note of necessities for the bathroom, which might well be framed as texts. Mr. Alfred E. Taylor's skittish drawings are a satisfactory accompaniment to Mrs. Heaton's amusing words: the combination makes a book which will be welcomed as a birthday or Christmas present, even by those who possess it already.